

Chapter 1 – Prelude to a Spark

To some, the little cabin was visible just beyond the first set of trees. To others, little more than a forest existed there. A forest that, if they should happen to draw near to, would give them the sudden sensation it wasn't safe. They would then turn and scamper away, glancing over their shoulders to ensure that nothing was chasing after them. It was a cheap way to guard one's home from unwanted guests, especially since it only worked on Muggles. But it was sufficient enough.

It wasn't a very big cabin; just a handful of rooms, really. But it kept the two occupants feeling nice and cozy. And on the rare occasion when company came over, it just made the atmosphere even moreso. A living room that had an attached kitchen was what greeted visitors, with a hallway in the back that immediately turned to the right and led to the bathroom and two bedrooms. A few pictures lined the walls, most of a trio of family members, one of whom no longer took up residence in the house.

It had happened over four years ago, mostly due to a certain incident that had happened. Neither of the two remaining thought about it too much, as it only resulted in a longing setting in. The two were, however, quite happy when they didn't think of the past. Though the family's income wasn't great, it let them live a pleasant life without want. And, due to the protection on the house, they lived in peace at the edge of the forest.

Or rather, they lived in peace *most* of the time.

"*Solieyu Dietrich Reinhardt!*"

Wincing, the boy looked up through his eyelashes and into the face of his mother. Despite her rather...bubbly nature, the woman could definitely be a force when she got up a head of steam. And hearing of all that had happened to her son during his previous year at Hogwarts was just the thing to get her going.

"What on *earth* were you thinking? You know you can't do that around other people!" Cried the woman, who was staring down at her seated son.

Solieyu, from his spot on the couch, sighed and broke his gaze away. "They would have been killed if I hadn't, mother. And... Harry and Tonks have both told me that, whatever condition I have, they don't care. I couldn't let them die."

Despite looking as though she wanted to say more, Solieyu's mother let out a sigh of her own and sat down beside her son. She tried putting an arm around his shoulders, but he jerked away from her. "...I understand that, dear... but what if someone else had been there? What if someone had seen you returning? What would they have said!"

Still looking off, Solieyu's voice slipped into much colder tones as he replied, "You think I can't tell where people are? My senses haven't dulled, mother. On the contrary, they're growing stronger."

The two sat for awhile, Solieyu with his arms crossed, back stiff; his mother trying to work out exactly how she should go about expressing what she had been *trying* to say. Unable to put into words what was going through her mind, the woman got back to her feet and headed off into the kitchen.

"Sometimes I wish you weren't so much like your father... He always took things the wrong way, too." She said, staring out the window over the sink and into the beautiful forest that lay just outside. Getting no reply from the boy, she added, "You should know that I just want you to be safe, honey... Think about what would happen if someone found out..."

"Harry and Tonks will." Stated Solieyu, finally looking back towards his mother. "Harry already made a very calculated, yet incorrect guess. And I've already said that if he doesn't work out the proper answer by Halloween, I would give the information to them both."

Solieyu watched his mother carefully. She had gone almost rigid and went visibly pale. Aside from that, though, he could tell no change in her. He almost smirked - she was getting better at hiding her true emotions around him.

"And if they try hurting you? If they tell others?" Asked his mother, quietly.

Solieyu winced once more. Though he and his mother had never been on the best of terms after his father had left, they still got by alright. Most of the time. It was only when his condition came into the equation that Maria Schneider dropped her airy attitude towards things. She had resumed using her maiden name after she and his father, Trevor, had separated. Solieyu had never quite forgiven her for this, going so far as to keep his father's last name in a show of stubbornness. It was all quite a headache to even think about, especially since it was because of Solieyu that his parents had begun to argue so much in the first place.

Through all of it, though, Solieyu could never quite stay mad at her if she switched gears on him and started speaking in soft tones. It was almost worse than her scoldings. Solieyu was quite certain that his mother could take down a small horde of rampaging, male wizards if she was irked enough.

"Mother... Listen, please." He said, finally standing. Walking into the kitchen, he stood behind Maria, placing a hand on her shoulder. "Harry and Tonks are... different. But I suppose you'll need to meet and judge them for yourself before you believe me. Have them over for dinner one night. Let them stay the weekend or something... Watch how they act around me."

"I know I should be more considerate, honey, it's just--" Maria began.

"It's just that they're the only friends I've had since the accident and you're worried. I know. I was unnerved when Harry began putting the pieces together, as well. He's smart, mother. Even if I wasn't planning to tell the two of them, he's smart enough to go back, re-examine the clues, and figure out the right answer." Solieyu murmured, glancing out the window, too. "I *want* them to know. I want to be myself around them. I'm so tired of having to cover everything up... to hide who and what I really am."

Sighing after an extended moment of silence, Maria glanced over her shoulder, smiling wanly at her son. "Dinner, huh?"

Nodding, one corner of his lips turning up, Solieyu responded, "Yes. It's all I ask. Get to know them like I do. They're both good people. They've saved Hogwarts two years running now."

"Yes, yes, you've told me." Maria said, turning around to face Solieyu. "At least you didn't get involved in that whole basilisk fight. Imagine, something like that getting loose in a school..." She clicked her tongue a few times.

"I was incapacitated at the time." Solieyu scowled. "I was in no shape to walk properly, let alone fight. I had very few options. Rest assured, if I had been feeling more myself, I would have been right beside them."

Finally, a response other than tiredness and frustration crossed his mother's face. Unfortunately for him, it was a calculating glare. "Yes, I've heard about *that*, too. Poppy Pomfrey sent me a good, long letter concerning your not wanting to visit her."

"You wouldn't want to, either. Not only is she possibly the snarkiest mediwitch on the planet, that stuff tastes awful. Even if flavor could be added to it, I wouldn't want to take it." Solieyu said.

"How many times do I have to *tell* you, Solieyu?" Began Maria, shaking her head. "If you don't take it regularly, first your strength will go, then your mind will start to follow, and then..."

"Yes, I'm very aware of what comes next, mother." Spat Solieyu. "We both know *quite* well what comes next."

Crossing her arms, Maria surveyed her son briefly. "Then that settles it. I know you don't like it, but you *have* to take the potion. I won't have something like that happening in a crowded place like Hogwarts. Do it for me, if nothing else. I don't want to live alone, Solieyu. I don't want them to haul you off to Azkaban for spreading it."

"My willpower's strong enough to keep me away from the vile stuff for over a week. I know my limits. I take it when I absolutely have to and not a moment sooner." Solieyu said, turning and heading off towards the hallway. "I'm not stupid, mother."

"You act it, sometimes." Maria said. "There's no other alternative to the potion. You know that. It's the only way to keep it in check. And if you still refuse to do it for me, then think of these friends you seem to

hold in such high regards. What would your loss of control mean to *them*?"

This stopped the boy in his tracks. He stood in the doorway leading to the hall, head hung slightly. His reply never came.

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"ONE BLOODY MONTH?"

Andromeda Tonks flinched, clasping a hand up to her right ear and shooting an annoyed glare at her daughter. "Nymmy, please quiet down... I'd rather not lose hearing on one side."

"Sorry... but *still*!" Said Nymphadora Tonks, who was sitting cross-legged on the couch next to her mother. She was shooting a fierce glare towards the fireplace, where the disembodied head of Albus Dumbledore danced in the flames. "Why does Harry hafta stay at those awful Muggles' house for a whole month? He'll end up in the same condition he was in last year when he made his way here!"

"It *is* most unfortunate that Harry's family does not hold him in high regards. And I must again state that if Harry comes to harm any further, I will personally speak to Mr. and Mrs. Dursley about it." Said Dumbledore. "Understand, however, that the blood magic that keeps Number Four, Privet Drive so very well warded must be renewed once a year. And, as tends to be the case with such old magic, it takes a good while for it to do so..."

"So we do what? Just owl Harry and say, '*Oh, guess what, you're gonna be stuck there until the first of August, so try not to get yourself killed?*' You're off your nut!" Tonks declared, crossing her arms in a huff and staring off at a patch of ceiling.

"*Nymphadora!*" Cried her her. "Watch your mouth! ...Honestly. I'm sorry, Albus. She's been antsy ever since she got back in. All she's talked about is how we're going to get Harry away from his relatives."

"I quite understand, Andromeda." Said Dumbledore, smiling slightly. "And I wish that I could speed the process of renewel up. However,

attempting such magic could negate the blood magic entirely, leaving Number Four unprotected..."

"What's he got to be protected from, anyway?" Tonks asked, still staring off at the ceiling. "Afraid that greasy-haired git in the dungeons might sneak in and poison him in his sleep?"

"Alright, young lady, that's quite enough from you. Up to your room! No, no 'buts' - go!" Andromeda said.

Tonks glared at her mother, then to Dumbledore, before getting up and stomping her way out of the room and up the staircase.

Watching her leave, Andromeda sighed deeply before turning back to the headmaster. "I really am sorry for her behavior, Albus. But I do have to admit wondering about what he needs protection from, as well..."

"There are many people who would wish to do harm to him... Lord Voldemort's former Death Eaters no doubt still hold some sort of grudge towards him." Said Dumbledore, his tones turning a bit more serious. "In addition, something is happening at Azkaban at the moment..."

"At Azkaban?" Andromeda repeated. "What is it?"

"We aren't sure yet... but it seems as though the Dementors have been acting a bit strange." Dumbledore replied. "The Ministry is, of course, looking into it. I've heard that Cornelius himself will be paying a visit later this week, in fact."

"I wonder why I haven't heard anything about it." Andromeda wondered out loud.

"It has been kept very quiet." Dumbledore said. "I, myself, have only recently learned of it."

"You don't think the Dementors could get loose, do you?" Andromeda asked, eyes widening.

"No, I don't think it possible." Said the headmaster. "The Dementors are, as far as anyone knows, quite happy residing in the prison."

"As far as anyone knows." Repeated Andromeda. "That's the key sentence, isn't it? Suppose they *did* want out, though..."

"And leave behind barely mobile sources of 'food'? It's highly unlikely that even a single Dementor would escape, let alone appear at Number Four." Dumbledore said, his smile returning. "Such a thing would require a good number of things to go right... or wrong, as the case may be."

Blowing out a breath, Andromeda leaned her head back, groaning. "Nymmy's going to be hell to deal with this month." She said.

Chuckling, Dumbledore replied, "As most young girls have a tendency to be at one point or another. I quite remember a moment in your youth where you got two months' worth of detentions after nearly blowing up poor Argus' office..."

"*That...* is a completely different thing altogether." Andromeda said, blushing and scowling at the same time. "And I'd rather not remember it, thank you."

"As you wish. And now, as I have much yet to do, I must bid you a good evening." Said Dumbledore, his floating head lowering in a bow.

"Alright. I'll let you know if anything happens." Andromeda said.

"I can only hope that I receive no bad news. We seem to get a fair amount of our own here at the school, after all." Said Dumbledore. And, twinkle in his eyes and all, his head vanished from the fireplace, leaving Andromeda alone with her thoughts.

Upstairs, Tonks was laying on her stomach in bed, face buried into her favorite pillow. A few minutes later, she heard her bedroom door crack open. She made no move to acknowledge her mother entering, but didn't do anything to stop her, either. She felt the side of her bed tug down, followed by a hand rubbing at her back.

"I don't like it either, Nymmy." Andromeda whispered.

"It's not fair." Said Tonks, her voice breaking as she spoke.

"I know it isn't, sweetie." Andromeda said. "Few things in life are..."

"Why can't he stay here? We can protect him from anything... he fought a basilisk by himself! *He* can protect himself from anything..." Tonks said, her speech broken by a few ragged breaths here and there.

"I'm starting to wonder that, myself." Admitted her mother. "We've got to trust Albus, though... If Harry shows up hurt again, I'd hate to think of what he'd do to Harry's aunt and uncle..."

A silence filled the room, broken only by Tonks' occasional sniffles. When she finally sat up to wipe at her eyes, she was tugged into a tight embrace by her mother. She was quick to lean into it, feeling quite silly for breaking down and crying as she was. "Will you write him the letter, mum? I dunno if I could handle it right now..."

"Of course, sweetie." Said Andromeda, stroking her daughter's hair soothingly. "He'll be alright... Like you said, he fought a basilisk by himself. He's tough."

"Yeah..." Tonks said, shutting her eyes. "An' he kept telling me that he's the hero, whether he wants to be or not. An' heroes always come out fine in the end, don't they?"

Nodding once, Andromeda smiled down at her daughter. "They do. Tell you what. Instead of being down over something we apparently have no control over, let's figure out how we're going to get him away from the Dursleys next month... and what we're going to do once he's here. You don't suppose he'd mind having a *slightly* delayed birthday party, do you?"

Despite how she felt, Tonks grinned faintly. "I think he wants another one of those cakes... y'know, like you made that first summer..."

"Well, that's easily arranged." Andromeda said. "He drop any hints about wanting anything else?"

"Aside from being free from his relatives' house? I don't think so..." Tonks said.

"Well... one out of two then, huh? At least for now. Come on, let's go downstairs and think about how we're going to bust him loose once the time comes." Said Andromeda, letting go of her daughter and standing up. She held out a hand for Tonks, who took it and stood up as well, wiping at the corners of her eyes again.

"Can I set their rear ends on fire?" Tonks asked.

"No. No firestarting." Answered Andromeda.

"Aww. Okay, um... can I... whack 'em with toilet seats?"

"Toilet seats?" Andromeda exclaimed. "Where on earth did *that* come from?"

"Ooh, I never told you?" Tonks said. "Alright, well, you know when we went to Diagon Alley last year...?"

As Tonks and her mother left the bedroom, she told the story of how Arthur Weasley had clocked Lucius Malfoy upside the head with one in their fight. And while it gave her cause to laugh, it also somehow managed to plant an odd sort of seed in Andromeda's mind. A seed that, once it had been watered a bit, would eventually bloom and become the plan they would use to free Harry.

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Author's Notes: I can't keep away from you people! It's like 4:25AM, I've been writing for over an hour - mainly because I kept pausing to think on what I'd like to have the characters say or do.

Anyway... Here's our little prologue chapter 1 to begin PoAR! I hope you guys don't mind my not including Harry in it. As I said, I wanted to give a little insight into Leon's home life. And I hope I managed to give a fair amount of detail into it. I also figure I should go ahead and just admit that, 'Dietrich' aside, all the names used to create Leon's family were taken from various Castlevania games. Leon's middle name came to me when I

was watching Trinity Blood. I thought it would fit in nicely with his first and last names. I think his full name rolls off the tongue well, anyway.

As for Leon's relationship with his mother... all will be explained on Halloween! After that, I figure there's not a lot to flesh out. And good lord, it was hard to skirt around the 'condition' without BLATANTLY just stating what's with him. Ach. Though I think I've clearly pointed in the obvious direction on what it is now. Maria Schneider isn't a woman to trifle with, though she is and will be a bit of a bubblehead when she ISN'T all frazzled an' stuff. And I only just realized that Trevor's also Neville's toad's name. But as no one's spotted Neville in awhile, let's just say that he and his toad fell into a toilet and got stuck, shall we? Neither are important... but Trevor Reinhardt isn't exactly a major character, either. As of this moment, I have no plans to bring him back into the picture.

And, as I've given up through the arrival at Hogwarts a timeline, I can finally declare how long poor Harry's gonna be stuck at Number Four this year! Poor guy. And don't forget... guests are arriving soon.

That's enough blathering from me. I'm not entirely sure how I'm gonna pad out the next chapter. But it's going to take some creative writing. I may have Harry be lonely and all introspective on certain things. I'll find a way. I've got to keep chapter 2 entirely secluded to Number Four. I don't wanna break my chapter guide on the SECOND chapter, after all. Until next time, folks!

Chapter 2 – A Dark Beginning

Dear Harry,

Unfortunately, talks with Albus didn't go as well as planned. Despite Nymmy's protests - which she did a great deal of, by the way - I'm afraid you're stuck there until August. I don't know what I can do to help you out... I do hope you can get out every so often and pay us a visit, even if it's a short one.

Don't worry too much, though. Albus said that if anything happens to you again over there, he'll personally stop by and have a few choice words with the Dursleys. And the two of us are quite busy working on the plan to get you out of there once the time comes. I've got a fairly simple, yet hopefully effective plan worked out.

Nymmy would have written you herself, but I'm afraid she's been feeling pretty upset since the talk with Dumbledore. She wasn't very happy with him, as I'm sure you're not. Hold on, Harry. You'll be out and enjoying your birthday cake before you know it. Hope you don't mind a late party. Take care of yourself.

- Andromeda

Harry stared down at the letter, re-reading it numerous times before letting out a sigh and collapsing backwards onto his bed. Hedwig had delivered the letter to him early on the morning of the eleventh. Harry had written a short reply, saying that a month might take too long, because his Aunt Marge was coming by on the 20th of July to stay with them for awhile.

Harry loathed Marge with a fury he had only felt on a few occasions. It was mostly because, while his uncle would manhandle him, any injuries were kept to places not readily visible if he were to step outside. But Aunt Marge liked to get drunk... and when that happened, Harry suffered, because she didn't care where he was struck.

It was almost strange, in a way. Whenever Marge was around, Vernon had an odd tendency to stick up for him. Harry just figured he wanted to be the only one that got to throw him around. One time, Marge had outright decked Harry, giving him a beauty of a black eye.

Vernon had ranted at the woman for well over an hour after that, covering a wide variety of topics. Mostly having to do with what people would think if they saw him like that. Above all, the Dursleys didn't wish for anyone to think that they were strange in the least.

It didn't really stop Marge, of course. She would still cause Harry bodily harm. She was actually larger than Vernon, so he couldn't very well just fight her off. In addition, even if he could, she usually always brought along one of the many dogs she owned. If he ever got out of striking distance, she would send the dog after Harry. He had been stuck up a tree for almost six hours one day because of one of Marge's stupid little pets.

Not for the first time, Harry cursed AlbusDumbledore's name.

Glaring up at the ceiling, Harry couldn't help but go over the reasons why Dumbledore had taken the wizarding staff he had used to kill the basilisk. The headmaster had claimed that it was far too powerful for a teenager to keep and wield regularly. He had claimed that it wouldn't be safe for Harry to take the Staff of Ravenclaw back to Number Four with him. Harry briefly smirked at the thought. No one in the house would dare even *look* at him cross if he had Ravenclaw's staff with him. But then, he even couldn't promise himself that he would keep them alive.

Standing, Harry walked over to the window, letting his head thump against it. He had always wished that something bad would come and happen to his relatives, as far back as he could remember, anyway. He wanted them to hurt like he had hurt. He wanted them to suffer like he had suffered. Normally, such dark thoughts would never even get close to Harry's mind. But his so-called family was a different matter entirely. If some random serial killer busted loose from prison and murdered them all in their sleep, Harry would celebrate.

But there was nothing to do about it. Such thoughts would remain as thoughts. He was powerless so long as he was in their 'care.' Harry doubted that the Ministry would let slide the use of magic, even if it was to save his own life. Harry made a mental note to ask Andromeda about that kind of thing. If the Ministry didn't allow the use

of magic to save one's own life if one just happened to still be underaged... then the Ministry could go jump in a bloody lake!

Why did the blood magic even *matter*? Hadn't Harry proven himself on two separate occasions that he could take care of himself? Why the hell would Dumbledore knowingly stick him back into a place where he lost that power! Why would he *repeatedly* force Harry back to Number Four, knowing that he had no way of defending himself?

Everyone always told him that Dumbledore was possibly the greatest living wizard of their age. Harry couldn't see why. Only on one occasion had Harry seen the man even do anything to solve a problem, and that was back in his first year at the school. Harry had been the one to save the Philosopher's Stone! Harry had been the one to kill the basilisk and remove Riddle's memory from existence! Why was he being treated like a *criminal*?

Then and there, Harry made a promise to himself. The Dursleys would never lay their fingers on him again. Ministry or not, blood magic or not, Albus blasted Dumbledore or not... he would fight back *and* leave if anyone tried to attack him! He had the power to fight back, now that he knew how to focus and channel it. He would deal with the consequences as they came. With a smirk that looked entirely out of place on his face, Harry walked back to his bed and laid back down onto it. Let Marge come. If she raised her hand, she would be given much worse than a black eye in return.

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The problem with his plan, Harry thought, a few days later after Marge had arrived, was that he had no access to his wand. The Dursleys always locked his trunk up in the cabinet where he had spent most of his life living in. Harry wasn't sure of where the key was. He wasn't going to leave his property behind - he had very important things inside of it! His dad's cloak, the shard of the Philosopher's Stone, all of the stuff he had been given for birthdays and Christmases in the past two years. All of it was inside.

Thankfully, through some kind of nod from the fates, Marge hadn't brought along one of her little hellbeasts this time. She had, however, brought enough liquor with her to sauce a small nation.

Harry had kept to his room for the most part and things had been going remarkably well. And that had Harry worried. Whenever something good happened to him, chances were that something bad was going to follow it up. And Harry's bad luck was worse than most. Not to say being trapped in a house with four people who routinely saw to it that he got brutalized was lucky, *per se*, but he hadn't been flung down the stairs yet. So that, at least, was something.

The most annoying part, at least in Harry's eyes, was the fact that he hadn't been able to talk to his uncle alone yet. Harry had been smart enough to at least get the Hogsmeade permission slip out of his trunk. He had shortly kicked himself for not grabbing his wand, as well. Harry had a good story in place, too. After all, he really didn't have a whole lot else to do in his room. Couldn't read any books, since they were in his trunk. Same went for homework. He came out to eat and do whatever chores the Dursleys wanted him to do, and that was about it.

Finally, on the night of the 25th, Harry managed to corner his uncle as the man came from the upstairs bathroom, grumbling about Marge always occupying the one downstairs.

"U-Uncle Vernon? I... um..." Harry began. He hated how he acted around his relatives, but he couldn't exactly help it. He *always* stuttered around them, no matter how 'normal' he could talk during the rest of the year. It was something that over a decade of abuse had bashed into him.

"What is it, boy?" Vernon snapped, glaring down at Harry.

"I... the school, you see, they're... they thought..." Harry started. Feeling frustrated at that point, he shoved the Hogsmeade permission form out in front of him.

"And what is *that*?" Vernon asked, looking from Harry to the paper.

"The... the headmaster thinks I... I need to be punished more often... I didn't want to show you this, b-but he'd be horrible if I didn't..." Harry began. One part of him, for the briefest of moments, thanked his annoying stutter. It helped make him sound even more pathetic than

he was going for. "Please don't sign it, though! I-If you do, they'll... they'll beat me every day...!"

As expected, a bright glimmer flashed through his uncle's eyes. Reaching out carefully, as if the paper might come to life and eat his hand, Vernon took the form from Harry. Harry thanked the fates for the fact that the permission form kept things mercifully vague.

"Beat you, eh?" Vernon drawled, flipping the paper over to check the back. "And what type of beatings would these be?"

"Y-You don't want to know... i-it involves the... the 'M' word..." Harry muttered, staring down at the ground, shuddering. The shudder came from Harry imagining what the Dursleys could have done to him if they had been wizards. It wasn't a pretty thought.

"I see... Only fitting, I suppose." Vernon said, smiling nastily. "Well, you tell your headmaster that you will go to this... this *place*... any time they see fit to send you there!"

"N-No!" Harry said, trying his best to sound frightened. "P-Please, Uncle Vernon, don't... don't sign it...!"

"Quiet!" Roared Vernon, who vanished into the master bedroom for a minute. When he returned, he shoved the permission form back to Harry and, chuckling quietly, turned and headed downstairs. A moment later, Harry heard the banging on a door, followed by his uncle yelling, "**MARGE!** Stop running up our water bill!"

Harry glanced down at the permission form, smirking as he spun around to run back into his bedroom. Not only were his relatives complete idiots, they were *gullible* idiots, to boot! Lifting up a loose piece of floorboard that he had found one night, Harry put the permission form into his little hiding spot. No one would find it now!

Walking over to the desk, Harry picked up the tiny nub of a pencil that he had found under the dresser. And, on a spare piece of paper, he crossed off yet another day on the makeshift calendar he had drawn up. Less than a week... Less than a week and he would be able to escape. He would be able to be close to Tonks again. It was the only thing keeping him going through all of Marge's drunken screechfests

and item throwing. Harry hadn't known that he was capable of dodging a waffle iron lobbed at high speeds. But sure enough, he had leapt to one side and dodged the heavy machine. It flew past and shattered a mirror that Petunia kept on the wall so she could primp her hair after eating. Unfortunately, Harry took the most of his aunt's anger, but she was so wiry that he only wound up with a few bruises. Thankfully, she hadn't tried attacking him with the broken shards of glass.

No, that was more along the lines of something that Marge would've probably tried.

Flopping down in bed, Harry closed his eyes. All things considered, his plan had gone rather well. When beatings were involved, his uncle was quick to decision, that was for sure. Harry just couldn't see how the man had believed his awful acting. He would never become a big movie star, that was for sure. He was simply terrible at crying on command.

But it didn't matter. All that did was that he and Tonks would be together again soon. Just thinking about her made him feel better. If he could manage to slip into a daydream or, better yet, fall asleep completely, he could sometimes almost smell her again. Last day of the previous year, she had been smelling of cinnamon, almost. It was a soothing sort of thing to think about. Harry needed all the soothing things he could get at the moment.

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"*What?*"

"You heard your uncle!" Petunia snapped, trying to button Dudley's shirt. "We've been invited to a special dinner with the president of Grunnings! Marge will be watching you until we get back, so you behave yourself!"

"Oh, don't worry." Marge said, taking a sip from a flask she always seemed to have handy when a bottle of alcohol wasn't present. "I can handle the filthy little freak just fine."

"Well, see to it that he doesn't break anymore of my mirrors, at the least!" Petunia said, glaring at Harry. For his part, Harry glared back and thought that statement was entirely unfair. He hoped against hope that his relatives would get into some kind of horrible car wreck... but that left him alone with Marge, and she was almost worse than both his aunt and uncle combined. It was a lose-lose situation and Harry knew it.

Scowling, he turned away and watched Vernon comb his mustache, trying to get it even on both sides. When Petunia ushered Dudley over, the three said their goodbyes to Marge and headed out the front door. Harry stared at the door for awhile, listening as the car started up, backed out of the driveway, and took off down the road. He then looked aside at Marge, who was nursing a shot glass of something amber-colored. Harry wasn't sure where she had gotten it.

"Get up to your room!" She suddenly snapped, peering over her shoulder.

"Yes, Aunt Marge." Harry said, turning and walking up the stairs. If she wanted him away, it was just fine by Harry. The less he had to be around the drunkard, the better. He wanted to be in her presence as much as she wanted to be in his.

Closing his door, Harry walked over to his calendar and, glancing outside briefly, crossed out the final day - the 31st. He hadn't received any owls with presents, but he suspected he knew the reason why. He was sure that, even though she couldn't get him out for a month, Andromeda had at least made sure that he wouldn't get in trouble for a flock of birds showing up at all hours of the day.

With nothing better to do, Harry crawled into bed, staring up at the ceiling once more. It was a thoroughly boring and oftentimes depressing pastime, but it helped him get to sleep on more than one occasion. Unfortunately, with his escape the next day dancing in his mind, he just wasn't tired. His mind kept going over ways that the Tonks women could break him out of Number Four. He was personally hoping that they busted in through the front door, firing spells left and right... but he didn't honestly expect that little dream to come true.

So lost in thought was he that he didn't notice his bedroom door opening. Nor did he notice the footsteps of someone approaching. Only after a few moments of having the person looming over him did he open his eyes. It was just in time to get smashed dead in the nose by the bottom of a whiskey bottle.

Letting out a pained cry and clutching his face, Harry quickly rolled off his bed on the side that Marge wasn't standing - or rather, wobbling - on. He could feel the blood flowing over his skin and into his mouth. He was also pretty sure his nose was completely broken, given that he was having trouble seeing, the pain was so great. Even in their worst hours, his other relatives didn't break his bones.

"What do you want?" Harry hissed, glaring violently at the large woman.

"Tsk tsk... that's no way to talk to your superiors..." Marge spat, her voice slurring with every 'S' she came across. "You little brat... how dare you speak to me like that!"

"Get out of my room!" Harry growled. "Now!"

"Or you'll do what?" Marge asked, smiling stupidly. Holding her arms out - the bloody whiskey bottle still clutched in one - she laughed. "You have nowhere to go."

Indeed, she was right in that regard. She was so fat that he'd never be able to get around her and out of his room. On the up side, she only had the bottle as far as weaponry went, and Harry knew that he could leap the bed and escape into the hallway before she could waddle around his bed. She could throw the bottle at him, but his finely-tuned Quidditch reflexes would help him easily avoid something like that. Harry wasn't sure what Marge was planning, but it didn't seem to be very well thought-out.

"I SAID GET OUT!" Harry hissed, this time literally, at Marge.

Marge blinked, squinting to get a better look at Harry. She glanced briefly to the bottle of whiskey. After eyeballing the bottle, she shrugged and took a swig from it, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. "Get over here, boy."

"No." Harry said. His nose was still bleeding and there really wasn't much he could do about it. He couldn't exactly squeeze it shut - he was in enough pain as is. And besides, the blood would probably just back up and go directly down his throat instead. He was swallowing enough blood as is, having nowhere to spit it out.

Marge started her move around Harry's bed. And, once he was sure she couldn't get to him on *either* side of it, Harry leapt onto and over the bed. But the fates had decided that Harry had been lucky enough for one month, apparently. Marge hadn't moved the way Harry thought she was going to. Apparently, she wasn't drunk enough to keep her from noticing the obvious escape route she had given him access to.

She had ahold of his right arm in one hand and was taking wild swings with the bottle using her other. Whiskey sloshed out the open top, splashing on everything in the area. Harry tried wrenching himself free from her grasp, but her hand was like a vicegrip on him. With no other means of attack, Harry did the only thing he could think of - he kicked her.

His foot came up and connected with the bottom of the woman's large stomach, causing her to gag and stagger backwards. This also caused her to release her grip on Harry, who shot off into the hallway and quickly got downstairs. Harry prayed that his horrible aunt would just trip and fall down the steps as she gave chase. At the very least, she would hopefully break a leg or something.

As he wheeled around and headed into the living room, he had to duck to avoid the whiskey bottle. Marge had made a disturbingly accurate fling from the top of the stairs. The bottle shattered just behind the living room couch, which Harry was quick to leap over to put more distance between himself and Marge, who was steadily lumbering downstairs.

Eyes darting about the slightly darkened room, Harry saw bottles of liquor everywhere he looked. Still holding his nose with one hand, he grabbed a random bottle with the other and threw it with all of his might at his aunt. Marge got her arms up in time to stop it, and Harry's throw hadn't been enough to cause the glass to break. What it

did do, however, was cause Marge to get even more enraged than she already had been.

Letting out a horrible roar of sorts, Marge charged into the living room, grabbed a few of her liquor bottles, and began lobbing them at Harry. Harry, at the other end of the room, was ducking repeatedly to avoid being struck. He never *had* been much good at aiming; probably was the reason he wasn't a Chaser.

Unfortunately, Marge was also deceptively fast at hurling things, as a rogue bottle of brandy crashed into his forehead, causing him to stagger back and collapse to the floor. Feeling quite dazed and still in pain from his broken nose, Harry tried getting back up, only to topple over again. While Harry was doing this, Marge took the opportunity to stalk closer, two fresh bottles in hand.

So this was it? Harry inwardly laughed through the pain. He had stopped Voldemort three times in his life - once as a baby and twice at Hogwarts in various forms. And now a drunken fat woman was going to kill him by bludgeoning him with 40-proof? Something was innately wrong about the whole situation.

Marge stormed up to him and, in a still-drunken voice, cried, "I never did like you, you horrible boy! You took after your mother, that foolish bitch!"

Harry's eyes focused at the mention of his mother.

"Showing off as if she were the queen! Thinking she was so much better than everyone else just because of her unholy powers! Running off with that boy and getting themselves killed! They both deserved it! Why did you have to survive and ruin Petunia's life?" Marge howled.

"Don't you talk about my mother and father like that..." Harry hissed, backpeddling across the floor and broken glass. Staggering to his feet, he growled, "You didn't know either of them! None of you did!"

"I will talk about them as I see fit, boy!" Marge screeched, throwing a bottle at Harry, who ducked to one side, causing it to smash into the wall behind him.

"And don't you ever call my mother that again, you fat cow." Harry spat, his eyes narrowing. His vision was still awful, and he was still in a lot of pain, but he had enough energy for this, at least. He wasn't going to just lay there and let his parents be insulted in front of him.

"Fat cow?" Marge screamed, brandishing her remaining bottle like a samurai sword and storming forward. "How *DARE* you, boy!"

As she approached, Marge raised the bottle in preparation to strike. But she never got that chance. A number of things began to happen, of which Harry would remember none of afterwards. The first thing that happened was that his aunt almost seemed to freeze in place, mid-scream and all. Then the bottle fell to the floor and shattered. Her eyes grew wide... and the rest of her followed suit. She was already a large woman, but she was rapidly growing larger, almost ballooning out. Her feet left the ground and she began to float upwards, bumping her head against the ceiling.

Two things happened after that. Harry was only dimly aware that a door had opened somewhere close by. All of the anger, the frustration, and all of the pain he had been going through were all flowing out of him at that moment. And unfortunately, Marge was playing the unwilling victim.

Her face remained frozen in place as blood began dripping from her nose. Then a trickle started coming from the corners of her mouth. Her ears were next and, at least as far as it could be told, her eyes were the last area that blood began to leak from. The flow became thicker and thicker, oozing out of the openings in her head. Harry kept focused on her... that is, until something connected with the back of his head, sending him falling forward, unconscious. The last thing he saw was his aunt's bloody face staring down in horror.

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Author's Notes: 'Christmases'? 'Christmasi'? I dunno. It's a tiny, tiny point, anyway.

So...uh... I guess this is where I put in the disclaimer, huh?

My Harry is calculating to a fault sometimes. As such, he usually thinks too damn much, which ends up getting him into trouble. And, at times when he's left to his own devices - like being stuck at Number Four for a month - not all of his thoughts are good ones. He wants his relatives to suffer and he won't be changing that opinion anytime soon. Harry forgave Dobby for his actions because he saw how Dobby was treated and felt an odd sort of connection. He, too, knew what it was like to be beaten and abused.

His family has no such hope. They're greedy, awful people.

Of course, this won't matter much, as my Harry isn't to the stage of being truly dark and brooding just yet. He's just hitting puberty, after all. Wait a year or three. Things will change. Quickly, at that.

If it wasn't readily visible, yes, I hate Aunt Marge, yes that was a drastic change from the book, and yes, I enjoyed writing it. I have more destructive spells that the Invidia Eximo planned for Harry's exclusive use on down the line. Much, much more destructive. And not just in a physical sense, either. The way I see it, my Harry will become interested in spell construction some time in the middle to late stages of fourth year.

Don't worry - the story will never get totally emo on you. But it will fall into darkness for varying lengths at times. Especially after fifth year. If you don't want to read about a dark, yet still calculating Harry, stop reading the R-Series after Order Reassembled. I guess I should announce that I can't, in good faith, keep the R-Series canon after Order, either. I can't. In fact, sixth and seventh years are in limbo. As I've stated, I have my ending written. It was done long before HBP came out. I'm not changing it. But in not doing so, I have to force myself from incorporating the very video game-like Horcruxes. I hate that concept and feel I can do better in terms of interesting ideas. I think Rowling is getting lazy, quite frankly. I've met very few people who even liked HBP as a whole, let alone liking the wholly stupid and quite silly Horcrux angle.

No...the R-Series will diverge after fifth year. I have my plans and I need them in place for book 8.

I'm done ranting now. Check back every so often for updates, folks. It'll take until chapter 5 for Prisoner to get its steam going, so try not to get bored with my slower pace, alright?

Post-Edit Addition: So why does Marge know about Lily and, indeed, wizards in general? I personally blame the liquor. Vernon's side of the family wasn't the only half that could never hold their liquor well... and I can imagine Petunia spilling most of the story to Marge one drunken evening, can't you? And in any case, it's not a big deal. So uh... yeah. Pardon my typos. I'm dead tired tonight. I cranked out the last two-thirds AND uploaded-slash-formatted the thing tonight. I go to bed now.

Chapter 3 – Shooting Stars

Andromeda bit her lower lip. Looking down at her daughter, she nodded once and, as one, the two burst in through the front door of Number Four, Privet Drive. They had been hearing some truly bizarre noises coming from inside - most sounding like glass breaking. Either Harry had gotten hammered and was throwing the finery around, or he was in a fight with someone. This hadn't been a part of the plan.

What the two women found after breaking in wasn't expected in the least. Harry and a very large woman were in the living room. The other woman was rapidly expanding and blood was starting to leak from anywhere it could escape. Harry was standing, hunched over with one hand clasping his own bloody face, glaring at the woman. It was all too apparent to Andromeda what was going on here. Since Harry didn't have his wand, and this was a truly odd use of magic, anyway, it seemed that wild magic was in effect and Harry only barely was able to focus it.

He didn't seem to notice that his burst of wild magic was shooting out at other things in the room. Most of the liquor bottles that didn't seem to have been thrown had shattered. There was a huge tear in the fabric of the couch, too. Andromeda was quick to draw her wand and stun Harry. It was the only way to stop the wild magic from getting worse. Harry collapsed to the ground and Tonks ran over to him, tears in the corners of her eyes, as Andromeda rushed to the fireplace and called some co-workers of hers at the Ministry.

After that, it was a simple matter of giving Harry the once-over. Andromeda floated Harry into the Dursleys' kitchen, where she set him down on the table. Shooing her daughter off so she could make sure Harry hadn't suffered any serious injuries, Andromeda was more than a little shocked at the condition of Harry's body. It had even more small scars since the last time she had unfortunately had to make sure that he wasn't on the verge of death.

Thankfully, some small cuts aside, the worst of the damage was kept to his nose. It was a pretty bad break, too. Even with magical healing, Harry was going to be feeling that one for awhile. Andromeda was good enough with healing spells that she could at least stop the blood

flow and clean him up. From there, it was a simple matter of transporting Harry back to her house. By the time she and Tonks left Number Four, a number of people from various divisions had invaded the house to fix Marge up and wipe her memory.

All the while, Tonks remained as close to Harry as she could, seemingly afraid that if he left her sight again, he would vanish. Or worse.

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"Guh... what the hell hit me? I don't--GAK!"

"You're awake!"

"Let go of him long enough for him to come to his senses, Nymmy."

Harry groaned as Tonks was tugged off of him by her mother. He winced at the sudden intake of light, hissing quietly. "Oh, damn... middle of the day, huh? Uh... sorry..."

"Oh, don't worry about censoring yourself just now." Andromeda said. "All things considered, I'd be expecting you to say worse. And I'm afraid I'm the one that hit you."

"You? Why?" Harry asked, cracking one eye open again long enough to glance over at the woman. ...Or at least where the blur shaped like Andromeda was. Harry scowled and asked, "And where are my glasses?"

"Here." Andromeda said, handing them to him. As he slipped them on, she explained, "You were in the process of killing that rather large woman. If I hadn't stopped you, she probably would have exploded. Don't think even Dumbledore could help you out if something like that should happen."

"Aunt Marge." Harry said, sounding livid. "It was as much as she deserved."

"Now now, don't be saying things like that." Andromeda said. "Anyway, you're safe again. Your nose is fixed and Dumbledore paid a little visit to your relatives this morning. I hear it was quite the interesting trip."

Harry brought a hand up and rubbed at his nose, frowning. "Stupid, drunken... what happened to Aunt Marge, anyway? Please say she was pushed outside and floated off to parts unknown."

"Sorry. I called some friends at the Ministry to give me a hand after I knocked you out... I'm sorry about that, by the way." Said Andromeda.

"S'alright." Harry said, shaking his head. "M'just glad to be out..."

"I've been holding onto your birthday presents for you, if you hadn't guessed already." Andromeda said, heading for the door. "And now I'd better get some breakfast ready. I'm willing to bet you're hungry."

"...Now that you mention it..." Harry began, frowning as the feeling really caught his attention.

After Andromeda left, Tonks crawled back onto the bed. Harry opened an eye and the two gazed at each other for the longest time. Finally, Harry smiled wanly, holding his arms open. Tonks let out a whimper and threw herself at him, embracing him once again.

"Sorry, Tonks... I don't mean for this stuff to happen." Harry said, sighing.

Tonks pulled back, sitting up on the edge of the bed. She then proceeded to ball up a fist and crack Harry in the arm. As Harry cried out and jerked back, Tonks glared down at him. "I'm going to come over every damn day next summer if that old coot forces you back there! And I'm bringing mum and Leon *with* me! We aren't gonna let you be alone there anymore. I'm tired of you always arriving all... broken..."

Rubbing at his arm, Harry frowned up at the girl, who was currently hugging herself. Sighing again, Harry pushed himself into a sitting position, wrapping his arms around Tonks and pulling her back into him. "So am I... And I'd love to have people over. With your mother

there, they wouldn't dare try anything... ...Hey, wait a minute... That gives me an idea!"

"Eh?"

"Dumbledore says I have to stay at Number Four like a month, right?"

"...Right."

"Did he ever say I can't have house guests? Or...guardians, shall we say?"

"...Ohhh, I see what you're getting at. You think we should demand that Dumbledore let us stay at Number Four next summer?" Tonks asked, turning enough to look into Harry's eyes.

"Exactly!" Harry said, eyes sparkling. "I'm sure they'll put up an almighty protest, but I don't really care. I'm sure Dumbledore would at least grant me some form of protection. And since I can't defend myself, having you and your mother around would definitely help out. We'd have to work out what to do during the day when she's at work, but..."

"You get good ideas in the worst of times, you know that? This one came about a month too late." Tonks said, raising an eyebrow.

"Yeah, yeah, I know." Harry grumped. "So how long was I out *this* time?"

"Oh, just a day. Between the stunner and what the mediwitch who dropped by gave to you, it put you out for a bit. How're you feeling?" Tonks said.

"Better than I have in awhile. ...Really hungry, though. Dammit, I was doing fine until she *mentioned* it." Harry said, pouting.

"Aww, adorable pouting Harry! Oh! Hey, I almost forgot! Guess who sent me a letter the other day?" Tonks began, beaming brightly.

"President of Burundi? **OW!**" Harry said, dryly. His response was followed by a light swat on the head.

"Leon! He says we're invited over to his place later in the month! Said he really had to convince his mum to let him have friends over, but he managed it somehow. Wonder what kinda place he lives in..."

"I wonder if he has a bed. OW! Dammit, stop that! I'm damaged goods!" Harry said, rubbing at his arm after yet another smack. "You hit me in the *same exact place!*"

"Well stop being such a smartass!" Tonks said, glaring. "What's got you actin' so snarky, anyway?"

"Having a liquor bottle battle'll do that to a guy." Harry said, scowling.

"All I can imagine is you doing some kind of drunken wobble while trying to stun someone." Tonks said, shaking her head.

"So help me, if you start calling me Drunken Master or something..."

Tonks smirked. "You'll do what?" She hopped up from her spot on the bed and spun around, leaning over slightly. "Wobble after me? Hiccup me to death?"

"Recovering or not, I'm not gonna take this lying down!" Harry said, throwing back the covers and hopping out of bed. "Come here!"

Tonks let out a squawk and ran out the door, turning to grin over her shoulder at Harry, who was right behind her. "Can't catch me!" She called, letting out a giggle and zipping towards the nearby stairs. Harry glared, but took off in hot pursuit of his friend. He was glad he had, too, for a moment later and he was having to grab Tonks' arms, tugging sharply to keep her from falling down the stairs. She had tripped up a few steps away, tumbled forward, arms flailing. Harry had caught up in that moment and prevented what might have been a deadly moment.

Unfortunately, Harry had put far too much pull into his tug. The result of this, of course, was that Harry wound up laying flat on his back on the floor, acting as an airbag for a falling Tonks. His ribs didn't much appreciate getting landed on, but Harry didn't mind. Better falling on him than down the stairs.

"Sorry." Tonks mumbled as she scooted off of him. "You alright?"

Rubbing his chest as he sat up, Harry nodded. "Been through much worse. This is nothing. How about you? What tripped you up?"

Sighing, Tonks sat at the edge of the stairs, glaring down them. "Oh, it's just been happening a lot more lately. Used to, I was good at *not* being clumsy. Dunno what's wrong with me these days."

Moving next to her, Harry slipped an arm around her shoulders. "Well, I'd say something, but I've taken enough bodily harm for one week, thank you."

"You *always* gonna be there for me if I fall?" Tonks asked, tilting her head to smile at Harry.

"As long as I don't have to be a glorified airbag? Then yeah, you can count on it." Harry said, smiling back.

"Aw, no more Pillow-Harry? But you're all squishy." Tonks said, poking Harry in the stomach. She then took up a snobbish accent and continued, "And lo, our hero did get big and puffy and he ate many pies..."

"Hey, shut up! I'm not puffy. I just haven't gotten much exercise, that's all. And it isn't like I've been stuffing my face. I'll probably *be* a bit puffy once I head off for Hogwarts, though. Magic or not, your mum's a good cook." Harry said.

And, as if on cue, Andromeda walked out from the kitchen at that moment. Noticing the two sitting at the top of the stairs, she asked, "Are you two ready to eat?"

"Now there's a silly question." Harry said, grinning as he stood. "I could eat a bloody horse at this point."

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"Hey, Leon!"

"Hello. Where's Harry, then?"

Tonks dusted herself off and hopped out of the large fireplace, stepping to one side and grinning over at Solieyu. "He'll be crashing along shortly."

And crash Harry did. Moments later, he hurled out of the fireplace, landing face down with a groan. Sitting back up on his legs, he brushed soot away from his eyes and coughed out a small cloud of the stuff. "I **HATE** floo travel!" He declared.

It had been almost a week since Harry's escape from Number Four, and he was back to feeling like his normal self again. Tonks had written to Solieyu and they had set up a time for their visit, which Solieyu claimed could last until a week or so before they had to go back to school. Harry had protested the means of getting to his house, but it was too long a drive for Andromeda to reconsider.

Harry had been quite amused with his presents that year, once he actually remembered he hadn't yet opened them. The Weasleys had all chipped in to set him up with an utterly massive selection of candies. The twins had thrown in a few custom items, too, claiming that they had a special project in the works and they needed as many testers as they could get.

Tonks and Andromeda had given him a good half dozen books, covering everything from magical theory to spell creation to rare monsters and where to find them. Tonks had then complained that Harry wouldn't want to do anything but read for the rest of the break. Harry had to promise numerous times that the reading would wait until slow moments at school.

Solieyu had sent him something interesting - magical contacts. A small container with a dozen daily lenses in a variety of colors. Harry had tried out a pair right away and found them to be almost as good as his glasses. Things were a little blurry with them, though, which Harry figured was simply due to them being a generic brand. Tonks had laughed herself silly watching him trying to get them on and off his eyes, though, as he had a rather difficult time with it. He had decided to save the others for special occasions. One of the remaining pairs would be put to use during Quidditch practice, for instance. If he didn't have to have his glasses on while flying around,

he wouldn't have to worry about them falling off... or getting knocked off by some underhanded Slytherins.

"Oh, dear, are you alright?" Asked Solieyu's mother, coming over and helping Harry to his feet. After checking him over, she spelled the remaining soot off of both of the new arrivals. "It's nice to finally meet the two of you. Solieyu has told me a lot of... interesting things about you two."

"Should we be worried, Leon?" Tonks asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Oh, not too much. I'm sure she'll only try attacking you in your sleep once or twice." Solieyu replied, keeping his face straight until Tonks' jaw dropped.

"Harry, if I'm not mistaken, I think our Leon just made a joke." Tonks said, in a stage whisper, over to Harry.

"I hope it was a joke." Harry replied.

Maria cast a look at her son over her shoulder. "Pay no mind to him, you two. He's been cranky the last few days."

Harry shot Solieyu a look as well at that point. "Has he, now? Any particular reason for it?"

"Oh, just anxiety, I suppose." Maria said, turning to head off into the kitchen. "It's the first time he's had friends over in years. Now then, I should go get lunch started if it's going to be ready on time!"

Watching as his mother left, Solieyu smiled at Harry, leaned in, and whispered, "If you hadn't noticed, tonight's the first night of the full moon. I'll prove that your theory is wrong."

Harry blinked. "It can't be wrong." He grumbled. "Too many coincidences."

"Werewolves aren't the only things capable of transforming." Solieyu said, cryptically. And then, in a louder voice, he continued, "Anyway, it's good to see you both again. How was your summer, Harry? Better than the last, I hope."

Harry and Tonks exchanged a look. "Well... not really. I kind of nearly killed my psychotic, alcoholic Aunt Marge after she tried clubbing me to death with liquor."

"...Beg pardon?"

As Solieyu led the two to the nearby couch, Harry and Tonks went about filling their friend in on what had been happening. He seemed rather shocked, shaking his head as they finished their tale. "It seems that in addition to something odd happening to you in school every year, something odd happens to you at home, as well." He said.

"Odd doesn't even begin to describe it." Harry said, shaking his head as well. "It was completely insane. I don't really have any memory of the minutes before I was stunned, though. I think my magic kicked in by itself to keep me alive. I don't want anything like that to happen again, though..."

"I can imagine. Wild magic can be quite dangerous." Solieyu said, nodding. "You're lucky Tonks and her mother arrived when they did."

"He's always lucky when I show up, though. Right, Harry?" Tonks said, growing her eyelashes out to ridiculous proportions and batting them at Harry, who laughed. Solieyu rolled his eyes.

"Oh, and before I forget," He added. "There's a repelling charm around the house. Keeps the Muggles away and tends to distract the odd squib or two, as well. Just for the record."

Harry scowled. "Repelling charms. I assume the reason you have one up is because of this mystery non-werewolf condition of yours?"

"Well, that and we like enjoying peaceful summers. There are a disturbing amount of door-to-door salesmen around this area." Solieyu said.

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"I notice you've been keeping us from the windows." Harry commented a few hours later, after the sun had set. "Any particular reason for that?"

Rolling his eyes, Solieyu replied, "I suppose you won't stop fidgetting until after I show you why?"

"Mmhmm."

"Right, then. Mother, we're going on out." Solieyu said, looking across the room to Maria, who nodded in reply, her nose in a book.

"We need to stick close to the house due to the charms, but there's a fair amount of room to move, so it shouldn't be a problem." Solieyu said, leading Harry and Tonks toward and out the front door. Taking them around to the back of the house, Solieyu pointed up. Harry and Tonks looked to the skies and were greeted with the sight of a meteor shower, backlit by the full moon.

While Tonks oohed at the lightshow, Harry jerked his gaze from the moon to Solieyu, who smiled in silent reply. A muscle in Harry's neck began to twitch. Unless they somehow charmed a barrier over their house to *trick* them, Harry's brilliant theory had been firmly shot down. And Harry didn't think Solieyu and his mother were the type to go that far just to trick someone.

"Remember what you said." Harry scowled, leaning against the house. "Halloween."

"I'm aware of what I promised." Solieyu said. "I keep my word. I just figured you'd rather work this out on your own rather than get told outright."

"Well, you're right. I hate not being able to solve a problem." Harry said.

"Problem, hm?"

"You know what I meant."

"I'm sure I did." Solieyu said, leaning back against the house as well and turning his gaze skyward. "Evening entertainment plus an easy way to prove you wrong all in one."

"Oh, shut up."

Tonks bounded over, leaning in close and peering at Harry. "Oi, now don't you go brooding on me, Harry Potter! Or else!"

"Or else?" Harry repeated, blandly. "Or else what?"

"Um... I dunno. Haven't thought that far ahead. But I'll consult Fred and George if I have to!"

"You wouldn't dare." Harry said, narrowing his eyes.

"I'd listen to her." Solieyu commented. "She'll do it."

"Hey, stop ganging up against me." Harry said, crossing his arms. "It's not fair."

"You started it, Emo McPoutypants." Tonks said.

"Hmph."

"I do believe you've insulted him." Solieyu chimed in.

"I do believe I have. Oh well. I know how to cheer him up again!" Tonks said, smiling sweetly.

"Would I need to vacate the area for it?" Solieyu asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Leon!" Tonks and Harry cried at the same time, both blushing.

Chuckling, Solieyu glanced at the sky briefly before smiling. "It's almost over. I'm heading back in. If you two are out here for longer than half an hour, I'm sending mother out to tote you inside."

"Eww, no one wants to be found snogging by their friend's mum." Tonks said.

"I agree. Alright, we'll all go in, then. And then I'll stay awake all night, trying to figure out what the hell you are, Leon." Harry said, swatting Solieyu in the arm as the three took off walking again.

"And good luck to you." Said Solieyu, smirking. "...Be glad I'm too tired to think of a way to infer that your staying up all night would be due to Tonks' assistance."

"**LEON!**" Cried Harry and Tonks again. And, after getting over the initial shock, (not to mention the blushing and embarrassment) Harry and Tonks eyeballed Solieyu, who backed up nervously.

"Uh-oh." He said, looking from Harry to Tonks and back again. "What do you two have planned?"

"Oh, nothing..." Harry said, grinning as he stalked closer.

Next to him, Tonks added, "Just remember - we started The List. Fred and George aren't the only ones at Hogwarts to be afraid of."

"...I'll just be heading back in now, if you two don't mind!" Said Solieyu, quickly as he could get it out. He then whirled around and took off running. Harry and Tonks bolted after him.

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Author's Notes: Yeah, I know this is late. Kinda. But I also said I wasn't gonna start book 3 until October started, so you can't complain. Nyeh. o.-

My birthday was on the second. It had to've been the single worst day I've had in the whole of 2005. I'm totally not stretching the truth there. I had an absolutely nightmarish day. Screaming and fighting was involved, I ran my dad (who was up visiting from Texas for the weekend) off less than a half hour after he arrived again (he's at a motel for the nights for some reason. Normally he sleeps out on the couch while he's visiting). Mainly because I claimed he was siding with my annoying mother. I swear, if I don't get outta this house soon, I'm going to lose what's left of my sanity. If that happens, Emo McPoutypants will become permanent for books 6 and 7. x.x I'm seriously not in any kinda good mood right now. It's a miracle I'm updating. You can thank Initial D's Eurobeat music (4th Stage, Selection 2) for making me feel a little better.

Chapter 4 might not be out for awhile. Just giving y'all the heads up. I'll try and write 5kb every few days or so, though. Rarely do I ever sit down and power out entire chapters in a single sitting. Got two games right now - both fun, even if Advance Wars Dual Strike is frustratingly hard. I'll be getting two more on the 4th and then a fifth will arrive whenever the place I'm ordering from gets it in. S'an import.

Anyway! Enough boring crap about me that doesn't matter - Now you know what happened with poor Harry and the space cow. Er... Aunt Marge. More Toppling Tonks and Harry's seemingly-airtight theory broken right in front of him!

I know not a whole lot happened in this chapter, but that's fine. Early chapters are rarely action-packed. Besides, it's all building to Chapter 5, anyways. And I do apologize for the weak ending to the chapter. I'm actually feeling kinda bleh as I write this (the last little section of the chapter, which was all I needed TO write to put it up... I'm writing this at 2:50AM on October 2nd, by the way) due to lack of sleep lately.

Post-edit update: Actually, I changed the second part of my notes to reflect how my birthday went. Originally I finished the chapter on the 1st and intended to update that night, so it looked a bit differently then. Anyway... I don't have chapter 4 started yet, and I think I'm gonna combine my ideas for chapters 4 and 5 into one because I don't think I can stretch them both out to average chapter length. I'm wanting to get the Halloween chapter for book 3 up before the REAL Halloween rolls around, but... I'd really have to struggle for that.

I'm sorry to say that due to what happened on the 2nd, I'm feeling more than a little bleh and uninspired. I don't want any sympathy - just normal reviews. I just felt I should explain why the next chapter might not be out for a bit. Here's to hoping I don't find a way to move out before the next chapter's done. Unlikely, but still... You never know. Again, I'm sorry for the lateness of this chapter and the next one in advance. Writer's block combined with having NO regularly-updating over-60,000-word Potterfics to read to get MY creative juices flowing's just... hell. Bleh. I'm gonna go to bed now...

Chapter 4 – On the Loose

The time spent with Solieyu and Maria at their house quickly came to an close as the end of summer began to roll around. After much begging, Andromeda agreed to let Solieyu stay with Harry and Tonks at her place until the school year started. As it was barely over a week away, Andromeda didn't see the harm of it. Maria seemed reluctant to agree at first, but eventually gave in. Before they took the floo back to Number Nine, Maria handed Solieyu a small, locked case that fit in the palm of his hand. The long-haired boy took it, but didn't seem at all happy to.

The sleeping arrangements were easy enough - Andromeda transfigured a few things and managed to fit a second bed into the room Harry always stayed in. Harry said he didn't mind sharing the space with Solieyu. Solieyu, on the other hand, thought that Harry just wanted to keep an eye on him. Harry seemed particularly intrigued by the case.

Half a week later, the trio had been feeling cooped up. So, while Andromeda was still off at work, they had decided to go out for a walk. It was a beautiful summer's day with only the thinnest of clouds littered in the sky, and it was milder than the average August afternoon tended to be. Harry and Tonks showed Solieyu around the area, including a trip to Privet Drive. As they went, Harry shared tales of what he had gone through over the years due to the Dursleys' abuse.

"I honestly don't know how you can stand even being around them." Solieyu said, glancing up at the second floor window Harry had pointed out. "I think your idea for next summer sounds good, though. I doubt the headmaster will deny you protection. Especially after what happened to you this year."

"That's what we're hoping." Tonks said.

"Yeah. If he tries weaselling out of it, I'll weasel out of the house. I'll just need to remember to pocket my wand this year. If my life's in danger, I doubt anyone would mind me doing an *Alohamora* or two to escape out a locked door." Harry said, slipping his hands into his

pockets. "I'm faster than all of them, anyway. The only problem there is the stuff in my trunk. I've got some very special things in there that can't be replaced. Dad's cloak, the shard of the Stone... all my important stuff, really."

"We'll fight tooth an' nail for ya, Harry." Tonks said, smiling. "So stop worrying about what's gonna happen a year from now, alright? Hey, let's show Leon where we met each other!"

"Yeah, that sounds like a good idea. My legs are getting a bit tired, anyway. Care to sit down and just enjoy the day for awhile in the park?" Harry asked.

"Sounds good to me." Solieyu said. "Will I be treated to a reenactment of the moment in question, or just told about it?"

"I dunno if I could fit into the space I was hiding under." Harry said, raising his eyebrows. "I've grown a fair amount since then."

"Yeah. All height, no mass. You're scrawny, Harry." Tonks said, prodding him in the arm.

"Hey, you said I was pudgy a few weeks ago." Harry said, shooting Tonks a glare.

"Yes, well you've obviously absorbed all that pudginess since." Tonks said, sniffing.

"Oh, shut it. And make up your mind about whether you think I'm puffy or thin." Harry said.

"You're definitely in no danger of being overweight." Solieyu said. "I daresay you could stand to eat more."

"Mum's taking care of that. And *your* mum seemed pretty intent on fattening Harry up, too." Tonks said, grinning.

"Oh, man, don't remind me." Harry said, clutching his stomach. "I thought I was gonna burst that first night. Like, if I had one wafer-thin mint, I would've just ruptured."

"Now there's some pleasant mental imagery." Solieyu commented.

"We're here." Tonks said, smiling as they reached the end of the road that the park was located on.

"Damn it, and look who else is." Harry spat, motioning just down one of the nearby streets.

Following his gaze, Tonks groaned and Solieyu just looked confused at the sight of Dudley and his gang sauntering along. Dudley was making wild gestures and random punching motions as he spoke. "Probably talking about beating up some six year old." Harry growled.

"We gonna turn around?" Tonks asked.

"We'd probably better." Harry said, scowling. "We can't use magic out here in the open or anything. We'd be sitting ducks. I can outrun them, I can't out-fight them. Hey, Leon, can-- Leon?"

As Harry turned, he found Solieyu down on one knee, a hand across his pained face. Kneeling beside him, he asked, "What's wrong? Oi, Leon, pull it together!"

"Sorry..." Said Solieyu through clenched teeth. "We need... to get out of here. Quickly..."

"That was the plan." Tonks said, leaning over. "But what's wrong?"

"Khh... It's nothing." Solieyu muttered, shakily getting back to his feet. "Come on..."

"I could probably rig together a shortcut, but it'll require a bit of moving. Leon, you feeling good enough to hop some fences?" Harry asked, glancing at his friend warily.

"As long as there aren't too many." Solieyu said, looking as though he was fighting with whatever was causing him pain. He was starting to sweat and his breathing was coming in short bursts.

Nodding, Harry looked once to Tonks and asked, "How about you?"

"I'm not about to be shown up by a pair of boys." Huffed Tonks.

The trio turned, Harry and Tonks on either side of Solieyu to help him should he need it, and together they headed for the second house down the street. Harry said that their back yard and the one past would be a good start to their impromptu hike. Just before they reached the house's driveway, Solieyu dropped again, this time letting out an anguished cry. Harry froze as Tonks' head jerked around.

"Shit!" She swore. "They heard him."

"Leon! Dammit, what's wrong? We can't help you if you won't--"

"You don't need to know!" Hissed Solieyu violently, twisting his head up to stare at Harry through dull, yellow eyes. "Just help me up..."

"Be glad I'm a good friend." Harry growled. "I wouldn't be taking that kinda crap under normal circumstances. Come on, Tonks. Let's get him out of here before he sprouts another head or something!"

Tonks nodded, helping Harry heft Solieyu back to his feet. The long-haired boy wobbled slightly, but the three continued forward as one. But once they reached the house's fence, they realized that the plan wasn't going to work. Solieyu didn't seem to have the energy to get over it and he was certainly too heavy for Tonks and Harry to lift him over.

Slumping down, Solieyu panted, "Tonks... run back to your house... On the dresser is a small case. I have the key on me... just... hurry..."

"Are you sure? Will you two be okay?" Tonks asked, looking from Solieyu to Harry.

"I've dealt with him before." Harry said, a steely look in his eyes. "What's the worst that could happen?"

"Don't... ask that..." Solieyu breathed.

"Go on, Nymmy. You're easily the fastest of the three of us. Especially with Leon down. I'll need to try distracting Dudley and his group as long as I can." Harry said.

"Right. Hold tight, guys!" Tonks called, leaping the fence in one deft motion.

As Dudley's gang approached - they were slowed considerably by their leader - Harry knelt next to him again, he asked, "Tell me what it is, Leon. Does it have to do with your condition?"

"What... was the first... clue?" Replied Solieyu in a waspish voice as he could muster through the strained breathing. "...Harry... If she doesn't hurry, this is going to pass... and then..."

"And then...?"

"...Promise me something. If... it's obvious what I'm about to do... stop me. I don't care how... just stop me..." Solieyu murmured.

"Leon?"

"Promise me, damn it!" Solieyu hissed.

"...Right. I promise. Just... try and keep it together until Tonks gets back, huh?" Harry said, wincing as a swirl of horrible thoughts entered his head.

"Well well..." Came another voice from nearby. "Look who it is. Hey, Big D, I think your stupid cousin has himself a boyfriend."

"Good afternoon to you too, Piers." Harry spat, getting to his feet again. "I see you've managed to remove your lips from Duddie's arse long enough to speak. A bit cliched, but I don't expect poetry from your lot, anyway."

"What did you say?" Piers snapped, starting forward. A thick arm brought him to a halt. Turning, he scowled. "C'mon, Dudley, let us have a go! You get to have all the fun."

Cracking his knuckles, Dudley smiled. "Dad told me that if I ever saw him, I should beat him stupid in his place."

"Shame I can't pull some more wild magic." Harry murmured, to himself more than anyone else. Then, louder, he continued, "Aww, does ickle Duddiekins have to make food cooked by his horrible, horsey mummy? Do you miss my cooking that much?"

"When did you start mouthing back, anyway?" Dudley asked, narrowing his eyes as he stomped forward in a sort of angry waddle. "You wouldn't act so big if dad was around."

"It's hard to act 'big' with you or him, as you have that gimmick trademarked." Harry commented. "How many chins do you have now, 'Big D'? Three? Or did we make the jump to five or so already?"

"Shut up!" Dudley roared. He pulled back one of his massive arms and shot it forward startlingly fast. Unprepared, Harry got clocked and was sent down onto his backside. His vision went completely black for a moment and he had to focus hard to get everything back into view.

"Touchy today, aren't we?" Harry said, chuckling faintly as he got to his feet again, albeit slowly. "Your time of the month?"

"Harry..." Solieyu croaked. "Get... get out of here..."

"I'm not leaving you." Harry stated. "A little punch or two isn't gonna be anything new to me."

"Not... what I meant..." Solieyu said. Slowly, he got back to his feet, using the fence behind him for support. "I don't think... I can hold it back anymore..."

"Hold it back?" Harry asked. "Hold what back?"

"Look, he's gonna crap himself!" Snorted one member of Dudley's gang. This was apparently very funny to the group, as they all began laughing. The laughter was soon to die, however. Solieyu had pushed himself away from the fence, shot past Harry, and delivered a solid, painful-sounding left hook to Dudley's face. Dudley was the one

caught offguard this time, crashing onto his sizable hindquarters as the rest of his goons plus Harry stared at him.

"Leon...?" Harry said, slowly.

Another sharp hissing sound came from the boy. Whatever was happening, Harry couldn't see, but it was making the rest of Dudley's gang back away with wide eyes. Dudley began to get to his feet, but Solieyu turned and connected his right knee to the fatter boy's numerous chins, sending him back down. It also seemed to knock him out cold, as his arms flopped out to the sides upon impact.

Harry's mind was racing. He could count the times he had seen Solieyu using physical violence on one hand. And even then, he was never quite so forceful. But here, he had apparently knocked his cousin out cold in just two shots. Harry had never seen that happen in his entire life. But his stance was awkward - Solieyu was hunched over, breathing heavily, and clutching at his face again. He was clearly wobbling, though his body wouldn't seem to let him fall again.

"Wh...what are you...?" Asked one of Dudley's gang.

Solieyu glanced up sharply at the boy, staring at him through his fingers. Harry moved up beside his friend to try and help him out should he need it. When he was close enough to see his friend's face, he was shocked. Solieyu's eyes were almost transparently yellow now, a sharp contrast to their usual golden hues. His skin was quite pale and he still seemed to be sweating a fair amount. Only now did Harry notice the boy's hands shaking as badly as his legs. Whatever was messing with him, it looked to Harry as if Solieyu was trying to fight it away best he could.

Trying and failing, if Dudley was any indication.

The next few minutes were spent almost motionless by all present. The tension proved too great for Piers Polkiss, however, as he turned and started bolting down the sidewalk. Solieyu shot off after him, catching up quickly - Piers kept tripping up - and leaping at the boy. Piers' head bounced off the concrete as he fell. The noise caused Harry and the rest of the gang members to wince. Solieyu leaned

down close to Piers' face for a few moments and said something very quietly to the boy before getting off of him.

Solieyu shakily made his way back to Harry, sending Dudley's group a hard look as he did. Piers was staring after Solieyu with a look of absolute horror on his face. Once he managed to regain control over his body again, Piers let out a shriek, scrambled to his feet, and ran off as fast as his legs could take him.

"...What did you tell him?" Harry asked quietly as Solieyu moved back to the fence to lean on it for support. But Solieyu just shook his head in reply. Harry made a mental note that Solieyu hadn't really spoken since he had got to his feet.

"Ooooooiii!" Came a cry.

Harry looked up to see Tonks leaping back over backyard fences. "Leon! Got the case!" She called, holding the object up as proof.

Once she joined back up with her friends, she handed Solieyu the case. He reached into the pocket of the faded, black jeans he had on and produced a small key. Using it to open the case, he pulled out one of two small vials of red liquid. He handed the case back to Tonks, who peered at the remaining tube with a confused look. Harry also looked, but his glance was on the one his friend was uncorking. The liquid was thick and seemed to swirl all on its own. Solieyu gave the vial a strange look before downing its contents in one gulp.

Letting himself finally slump to the ground, he held the empty tube up towards Tonks, who took it and carefully set it back inside the case, which she then closed. Figuring that the trouble was over, but knowing that a good half dozen large teens were still lingering about, Harry turned his gaze their way. Hoping his shoddy acting skills were still enough to trick the simple-minded, he smiled wickedly at them and said, "You'd better hurry. See, my friend's... not quite right, you see. You all seemed to have seen it. Well, this stuff makes him go crazy. Saw him nearly kill this one kid who tried messing with him... It was awful."

Dudley's gang, being of very little sound mind, started to step back slowly. Harry nodded at them. "Yeah, best to just get outta here. Me

and Tonks know how to calm him down. Don't worry about Big D here... I promise he won't be harmed any more than he already has."

"...You won't be around him all the time, Potter." Snapped one of the members feebly as the group slowly went from a backpeddle to a run. "We'll get you next time!"

Harry and Tonks watched them make their escape, both shaking their heads. "They'll get me next time? They need to stop watching cartoons." Harry said. And then, looking down at Solieyu, he asked, "And what about you? Feeling more yourself?"

"Much." Solieyu murmured. "Thank you. Both of you."

"Not a problem." Tonks said. She handed the case out. "You wanna lock this back up?"

Solieyu took the case and, with still-shaking hands, did just that. "I think I'll be good to walk again... but I may need some support."

"That's not a problem, either." Harry said, extending a hand. "Come on, let's get you back to Tonks' house. You sound tired."

"I *am* tired." Solieyu admitted, stowing the case in a pocket as he accepted the hand up. He smiled wanly at Harry, who noticed that the boy's eyes were back to their normal color. "And I wouldn't mind something to get the taste out of my mouth. I have to take this vile potion regularly, despite hating it... it keeps my... condition, as you say, in check."

"If it keeps it in check, why do you hate it?" Tonks asked as the three began their slow trek home.

"The taste." Solieyu explained with a weak shrug. "It tastes like blood."

The gears in Harry's mind came to a screeching halt.

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Solieyu had refused saying more than he had on the matter, though he did restate that he was going to explain all on Halloween. After the half hour walk back to Number Nine, Solieyu had spent the rest of the day asleep. Harry and Tonks related the story to Andromeda, who fire-called Maria. Unfortunately, Maria didn't seem too keen on divulging her son's secret, either. So whatever had happened, it would remain a mystery for a little while longer, at least.

The next day, Solieyu still seemed to be worn out, and spent much of his time just lounging around and not speaking. Harry and Tonks didn't mind so much. They had seen first-hand how badly the boy was affected and neither liked it. So they gave him time to recuperate. His health and spirit seemed to return quickly enough, though they didn't venture too far from Number Nine on the occasions they left the house.

September 1st was rapidly approaching and, as it did, Andromeda seemed to get nervous. For a few days, she would come home looking more and more worried about something. She also seemed to get overly protective of the three children in her care. Whenever asked, she would brush it off and say that work was just getting stressful and leave it at that.

The trio had tried working out what it could be, but none of them could think of a logical explanation. One came on its own during their trip to Diagon Alley, however. Andromeda had been putting it off as late as she could, for reasons she wouldn't confess to. As soon as the group entered the Alley, it all became apparent. Wanted posters were all over the place. All depicting one man. A man with long, dark hair and wild eyes. He had a five o'clock shadow and was laughing in the moving photo. Below the photo was his name and information about him.

"Sirius Black..." Tonks read. "...Hey, Mum, wasn't your maiden name Black?"

"Yes..." Andromeda said, worry evident in her voice now. "Sirius Black and I are related. Cousins. You too, I'm afraid."

"We're related to a wanted murderer?" Tonks cried.

"Not so loud, Nymmy." Andromeda said, frowning. "...And unfortunately, we are. He... Well, they say he went mad one day. Blew up a street filled with Muggles, amongst other people... This really isn't the time or place for this and... and I think Harry has a right to hear the full story."

"Me?" Harry asked, raising his eyebrows. "Why me? Should I know this guy or something?"

"...You shouldn't, no. And if things had gone right, you never *would* need to know of him." Andromeda said, putting a hand out on Harry's shoulder. "But... Sirius Black has escaped Azkaban. He's on the loose now..."

"He broke out?" Solieyu asked. "How?"

"Nobody knows... that's the problem." Andromeda said, glancing around nervously. "But he's loose now and, as no one knows where he's gone, the whole of wizarding Britain's on high alert."

"So what does that have to do with me?" Harry asked.

A pained expression on her face, Andromeda squeezed Harry's shoulder and murmured, "Because he's probably going to come looking for you."

"What? Why?" Harry cried.

"...I really don't want to have this conversation here, Harry." Andromeda said. "But... Well, Albus seemed so damned sure of himself, and the boys at the Ministry are up in arms about it, too..."

"That's why you've been so paranoid about us going out!" Tonks said, looking like she had just put two and two together. "Jeez, Harry's fought a guy with two faces and a basilisk, not to mention Riddle's memory. So what if some loony cousin of ours is wandering. S'not like he knows where we live or anything."

"And why would he come after me, anyway?" Harry asked. "What did I do?"

"You lived." Andromeda said. Sighing, and sensing that she wasn't going to be able to hold off on the conversation until later, she continued, "When *HE* came into power all those years ago, your parents were thought to be potential targets. They went into hiding. They used a very strong charm to keep themselves hidden... but it required a Secret Keeper. Sirius was that man."

"But if they were hidden, how..." Harry began. But, once again, the gears started turning and things quickly fell into place. Stepping away from the hand that Andromeda still had on his shoulder, Harry moved closer to one of the wanted posters. "...He told Voldemort where they were, didn't he? ...He's the reason they died."

Tonks looked from her mother to Harry, then over at Solieyu. His eyes were darting around the area, narrowed as if he sensed something. "Leon? What is it...?"

"...Nothing. Thought something felt off, that's all. Probably still feeling the effects of the incident a few days ago. Harry, you alright?"

Harry was silent, still staring at the poster. Eventually, he nodded. "Yeah. Just... gimme a minute? This is a bit much to take in."

"This is why I was hoping to wait." Andromeda murmured, reaching out and placing a reassuring hand on Harry again. "I don't like it any more than you do, though. In addition to being related to a killer, having to know that he did that to your parents is... hard to deal with. I didn't know Lily and James very well, but..."

"It isn't *your* fault." Harry said, looking over his shoulder. "...And don't worry, it's not like I'm going to freak out and start blaming you guys or anything. Still, it's... it's a lot to try and take in."

"It is. Come on, we need to get back to the house. The sooner we get out of a public place, the better I'm sure we'll all feel. Albus assures me our house is safe, though. He also said that Hogwarts' wards were all being double-checked."

"Yeah, fat lot of good those've been lately." Tonks muttered.

Harry smiled slightly. "Yeah. If Hogwarts is as 'safe' as it's been the last two years, I'll probably end up fighting this Sirius Black guy in the Great Hall or something before the school year's up."

"Don't even joke about things like that." Andromeda said, making a face. "I worry about things like that enough. My imagination doesn't need encouragement. Now come on, all of you. Thankfully, there's no celebrity book signings this year and people aren't lingering around in public. We'll be in and out at all the places we need to go to. And, as you can see, the Ministry's provided Diagon Alley with enough Aurors to handle anything."

"Was wondering about them." Harry said. "Seemed strange for people to just be standing around like that..."

The group set off again, with Tonks saying that if any cousin of hers caused Hogsmeade vacations to be called off, she'd show him worse things than explosions. This caused Harry to groan, remembering that his permission form was tucked away under the loose floorboard in his bedroom at Number Four. Andromeda said she'd talk to Dumbledore about it for him, to which he thanked her. As the four walked off, none of them noticed a large, black dog staring out from the shadows, watching them leave.

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Author's Notes: Dun dun duuuuun.

You know, this chapter was supposed to mainly be the Diagon Alley trip. Even had a run-in with Malfoy planned. But as I felt that was kinda old (and he'd have a number of chances at Hogwarts, anyway) and since this is gonna be Solieyu's big secret-revealing book, I figured I'd let him steal Malfoy's thunder this once. If you guys haven't worked it out by now, I dunno what to say. All will become clear in... ...uhh... Actually, I dunno how many chapters. Still only running off that five-chapter guide I wrote up in the beginning. After chapter 5, I'll sit down and plan the next five out, though. I'll be able to give you a good indication after that.

I hate family trees. Mainly because I've never been good at relations. I'm assuming that Tonks is a cousin as well and not a niece or

something. Someone correct me if I'm wrong, by all means. Seems odd for my Tonks to think of an 'Uncle Sirius,' though. Anyway, oughta be interesting once Sirius shows up in human form, eh?

I'm tired and cranked out everything from Leon's first drop to one knee clear through the end in one sitting. Eyes are tired, too. Good hour and a half of writing, as I kept stopping to check certain things and such. So... Yeah. Next chapter is the trip to Hogwarts. And you all know what THAT means! I'll hopefully crank it out pretty quickly. I want to get Remus' characterization set up.

Special thanks go to Raven Nightwish for helping me brainstorm. Had a bit of writer's block, which, in addition to the games I got a week or so ago, has been keeping me from finishing the chapter.

Post-Edit Update: Hopefully things'll turn out fine. This chapter REALLY hasn't wanted to behave for me in regards to proper formatting. Ach. I also hope I didn't miss any typos and the like, as I'm doing about four things at once right now, so I only had time to briefly skim through as I was fixing the formatting.

Chapter 5 – Dark Light

Harry sighed, staring up at the ceiling. It was nearly midnight and, as was normal before returning to Hogwarts, Harry was finding it difficult to get to sleep. He looked over at Solieyu, finding him sound asleep in his own bed. It was a rare sight to see, but ever since the boy's accident, Harry hadn't seen him awake past eleven at night.

On the other hand, Harry was worried about multiple things. What if Sirius Black came to Number Nine, thinking Harry was still there? Would Andromeda be okay? He wasn't so worried on if Sirius paid a visit to Privet Drive, though. In fact, Harry almost hoped the escaped convict *did* drop in on his relatives. It would certainly rule out his returning there next summer.

Dumbledore constantly insisted that Hogwarts was safe. Possibly the safest place in wizarding Britain, he had claimed on numerous occasions. Harry found it hard to believe the headmaster, considering the events of his past two years at the school. If Harry got lucky, maybe Black would show up during his Potions class. Harry didn't think Snape would let a murderer in his classroom, even if he *was* after Harry. Maybe Snape and Black would even fight each other to the death. Then Harry would have two problems dealt with.

Rolling onto his left side and tugging his blanket up higher, Harry groaned. He knew his luck absolutely sucked when it came to important moments. This, of course, meant that he would have to start putting some serious overtime in on studying up on spells of different kinds. Defensive spells could only last so long, but offensive spells were much harder to deal with. And, while Harry understood spell creation in theory, he also knew that it was way too early to even begin tinkering with it. He had seen pictures of wizards who had attempted spell creation before they were strong enough. It wasn't pretty.

Scowling, Harry eventually tossed back the covers and slipped out of both the bed and the room. Sleep just wasn't going to take him away for the night. He could sleep on the Hogwarts Express - the trip was long enough for a good, long nap. Then again, with his luck, something was probably going to come along and ruin that, too.

Walking downstairs, he was surprised to see something in the living room move. That something turned around and blinked at him, smiled sleepily, and waved him over. Smirking, Harry took the last few steps in a hop and headed into the other room to take a seat next to Tonks.

"Couldn't sleep either?" He asked, keeping his voice low.

"Nope. Too much to worry about." Tonks murmured. "Hope we have a nice, peaceful year."

"Fat lot of good wishing for that." Harry said. "We'll probably have to stop Sirius Black and turn him in to the Aurors ourselves."

"Don't even joke about that." Tonks said, shuddering. "I don't *want* to get near that guy, relative or not..."

"Seems everyone has at least one bad seed on their family tree, huh?" Harry said, letting his head flop back. Staring at yet another ceiling, he continued, "Who do you think's gonna be the new Defense professor?"

Tonks snorted. "Knowing Dumbledore?"

"...You're right, he probably found and hired Black." Harry said, shaking his head slowly.

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The next morning was the usual hustle and bustle to get to King's Cross on time. A mad scramble to get everything packed and in the car so they wouldn't be late. Seeing as Tonks had hopped into the back seat of the car with Harry, Solieyu took the front. He did, of course, have to bite back the myriad of potential jokes he could have made. But, given present company, they probably wouldn't have gone over too well.

"Hold on tight, Leon. Mum's insane behind the wheel!" Tonks warned.

"I am not! I'm a very *good* driver." Andromeda said, shooting her daughter a glare in the rear-view mirror as she pulled her seatbelt on.

"Unless we run into heavy traffic, we won't have any problems getting there. No need to rush now that we're actually *in* the car."

As the car pulled out, Harry yawned. This, of course, made Tonks yawn. The two in the front both slept well, so neither of them fell victim to the spreading yawn, though Solieyu found himself once more having to bite back a joke. Did they really know how many opportunities they were giving him?

The drive went off, thankfully, without a hitch. Once they arrived at King's Cross, Andromeda and the boys loaded their trunks from the magically-widened trunk onto carts. Once inside, Andromeda kept a lookout while the younger trio made their way through the barrier that lead to Platform Nine and Three-Quarters. Not surprisingly, it was rather packed with students and their parents. The train had arrived, but not many had boarded yet. Some had already changed into their school robes. It was made all the more obvious due to the fact that groups of students were clumped together. Very few from one House were talking with those from another.

"Harry!" Came a dual cry.

"And what have we here?" Harry began, turning around with a grin. "Well now, you two look a mess. What happened?"

Fred and George Weasley, both looking as if only their heads had made a trip via floo, ran up, panting. Their hair was also coated in a fine, black powder of some sort. Once they had caught their breath, George answered, "Testing new ideas for the new version of The List, that's all. Our trunks are already loaded."

"We needed a way to kill time." Fred explained. "We think you three will like what we've done with things. We got rid of a *lot* that we just didn't think would present a good chance, added a few new ideas we came up with over the summer, and jotted up a Most Wanted list."

"Most Wanted list?" Tonks asked.

"Yeah! Basically, it's a list of who *needs* to get pranked the most. Obviously, Snape and Malfoy are vying for the number one spot.

There's this egotistical git from Hufflepuff we've been meaning to have words with, too." Fred said.

"Was that the guy who kept taunting you last year on the pitch?" Harry asked.

"One and the same." George said. "Smarmy coward kept bringing our mum into things to try and distract us."

"I was wondering why you both decided to send Bludgers at his head at the same time. Seemed a bit vicious for you two." Harry said.

"Yeah, well... After he brought Ginny into things..." George began.

"We had to stick up for our little sister, you understand." Fred finished.

"How *is* Ginny?" Harry asked.

"Oh, she's fine." Fred said, waving a hand. "Couldn't be better. In fact, I think she's starting to get Ron's appetite."

"She was looking pretty wasted-away at the end of last year." Tonks commented.

"Mum took care of that just fine." George said, chuckling. "It got to the point where Ginny actually dumped a perfectly good salad on top of mum's head. Wasn't too thrilled with that."

"So, lads, what's the plan for this year?" Harry asked, hands slipping into his pockets.

"Oh, more of the same." Fred said.

"Pulling pranks, breaking hearts, stopping demonic entities that invade the school." George said.

"Same old, same old?" Harry offered.

"Exactly!" Said the twins in unison. "Been nice talkin' to the two of you, but we need to go make sure Ronniekins doesn't track the witch with the food cart down before the trip starts." Fred continued.

"He's been known to stalk her." George added. "See you two at school!"

With that, the two took off onto the train. Once they were gone, Andromeda asked, "No missing who *those* two belong to. Are they always so..."

"Odd?" Solieyu said.

"Well, not 'odd,' but..." Andromeda tried, making a vague gesture.

"Nah. They were pretty subdued today. Wonder where they were with heads like *that*, though. I mean, Malfoy and his gang of goons are on the other side of the Platform, so it couldn't have been him..." Harry said.

"Another mystery begins?" Tonks asked.

"I don't think I'm gonna lose much sleep over what they've been doing, so long as the result doesn't spring on any of *us*." Harry replied.

"Agreed." Tonks said. "...Uh-oh. Your girlfriend's coming, Leon."

"I beg your pardon?" Solieyu said, blinking. Turning, the very blonde head of a slightly-taller-than-before girl was bouncing their way. "Oh no..."

Luna Lovegood smiled as she pulled her cart to a stop next to Solieyu. She had grown a little more over the summer, though Solieyu still had a good half foot on her. Her hair was longer and, at present, very curly. Tilting her head to one side, she began, "Oh, hello, Solieyu... have you just arrived? I have..."

"Uh... yeah, a few minutes ago." Solieyu said, finding it hard to look anywhere other than at the girl. Harry and Tonks were behind him, trying not to snicker, to which he shot them a glare over his shoulder. Clearing his throat, he turned back to Luna and, in a more collected voice, continued, "How have you been? No ill side effects from being petrified?"

"Oh no, none at all." Luna replied in her usual, lazy voice. "My father took me on a search to find a very rare plant. We were worried that I would have to come to school late, but as you can see, we got back in time to catch the train."

Solieyu nodded. "I see. What plant were you looking for?"

"It's called the Tree of Woe. Have you heard of it?" Luna asked.

"I don't believe I have." Solieyu replied.

"It's well-known for being the birth place of flea men." Luna said, staring up at Solieyu with shining, blue eyes. "Flea men are very dangerous, you know."

"I see..."

"Tree of Woe's a myth..." Tonks whispered into Harry's ear.

"Well, I should get my trunk on board. I'd hate to miss the train after our rush to get back home..." Luna said. Offering Solieyu an odd sort of shy smile, she turned and trotted off, humming to herself.

"That was adorable. When's the wedding?" Harry deadpanned.

Solieyu turned and socked Harry in the arm, his face slightly flushed.
"Oh, shut up."

Tonks cracked up.

"I'm clearly missing something here." Andromeda said. "...Right, I'm going to let you three go on. I need to get to work soon, and I'll just be making it if I leave now. Take care of yourselves, have a good time, write often, and for the love of Merlin, be *careful*."

"Yes, mum." Tonks said.

"We'll try." Harry said, grinning. "But you know our luck."

"That's why I'm worried." Andromeda mumbled, rolling her eyes. She turned and headed back for the barrier, turning once to wave at them before passing back through it.

"Right! Now what?" Tonks asked.

"We should probably find a compartment. The Platform's thinning out." Solieyu said.

And it was true. At some point, most of the parents had left and most of the students had gotten onto the Hogwarts Express. Only a few stragglers remained. Harry let out a groan as the three made their way towards the train. "We're probably going to get stuck with someone weird."

"Us calling other people weird?" Tonks said, blinking. "Now that's the pot calling the kettle black."

"Quiet, Nymmy."

"Oi!"

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"Well, you were almost right." Tonks murmured.

"What's he doing on the train? Isn't it just for students?" Harry asked.

"He's probably the new Defense professor." Solieyu said. "There's nowhere else to go. We'll just have to be quiet slipping in. I'd rather not wake him off and start things off on the wrong foot."

"Agreed." Harry said. "Well... all in, then."

He slid the compartment door open slowly and the trio filed in. Harry and Tonks took up the seat opposite the sleeping man, while Solieyu sat next to him. As he sat, Solieyu shot the man a bewildered look for a moment.

He looked to be around 40, with light brown hair spotted with patches of grey. His robes were most certainly quite old, as they had many patches on them, not all of which were the same color. Though his head was tipped downward slightly, it was still evident that at least one faint scar went diagonally along his face. If the suitcase he had next to him was any indication, his name was 'R. J. Lupin.'

"Wonder what the 'R' and the 'J' stand for." Tonks whispered in Harry's ear.

Harry shrugged in reply, then responded, "Dunno. Wonder what he's been through, though. Looks like he's seen better days."

Tonks nodded. Then, making her voice only slightly louder, she murmured, "Leon, whatcha keep lookin' at him like that for?"

Solieyu shook his head, frowning. "...It's nothing, I'm sure." He whispered.

Harry and Tonks exchanged a significant look with one another.

The train started up moments later and the day-long trip to the school began once more. A few people dropped by now and then, most bringing with them bizarre rumors. While most of the news coming up had to deal with Sirius Black and his escape from Azkaban, others seemed to be about Hogwarts and what the headmaster was going to do to protect the students from the escaped madman.

"I heard he's going to station dragons around the school!" Said Neville Longbottom, who had stopped by briefly during his yearly search for his toad. "I hope he isn't, though. I don't like dragons much..."

"We've been hearing loads of rubbish." Fred Weasley said when he and George dropped in. "Everything from the Ministry dispatching every Auror available to guard the place to giants being called in."

"But we overheard something very interesting." George continued. He and Fred slipped into Harry's compartment and, glancing once to the still-sleeping R. J. Lupin, began, "See, we were up late about a week ago..."

"Experimenting for our secret little project, you see." Fred interjected.

"Right. So dad's come home late and we just so happen to be in the hallway when he arrives." George said.

"He was talking to mum in hushed tones, but we were able to make out most of the conversation from upstairs." Fred continued.

"We should've worked on the Ears more." George sighed, shaking his head.

"Plenty of time for that when we *should* be doing our Potions work." Fred said, patting his brother on the shoulder.

"Would you two care to get to the point?" Tonks asked.

"The point, right." Said George. "It's like this - Dad said Fudge was all in an uproar. Something about wanting to commandeer some dementors, if you'll believe it."

"Dementors!" Tonks hissed. "Is he crazy? No, that can't be true..."

"It can. Apparently, the Express here was also supposed to have one around. You know, in case Sirius Black shows up." Fred said. "Sorry about that, by the way." He added, nodding to Tonks. "Everyone's got a black sheep in the family, if you'll pardon the pun!"

"Dementors at Hogwarts. We'd sooner see Malfoy streak through the school." Harry said.

"Eurgh... Thanks for that, Harry. I'll never be able to sleep again." Tonks shuddered.

"I'm telling you, they'll be there." George said. "Dumbledore must be having a fit. He hates Dementors."

"I'd hate to meet someone who *likes* 'em." Tonks muttered.

"So why does Fudge want Dementors at Hogwarts so badly?" Harry asked.

"You." Said the twins in unison.

"Me?" Harry sputtered.

"Well, he *was* friends with your mum and dad, yeah?" Fred asked.
"You know about what he did, right?"

"Unfortunately." Harry scowled.

"Well, there you have it, then." George said. "He's likely to come after you. Probably feels the need to 'finish the job,' as it were. Dementors are apparently very good at remembering people they've fed off of."

"So they head towards familiar targets like magnets?" Harry asked, cocking an eyebrow.

"Something like that." Said Fred. "Anyway, I'm sure the old man'll keep them away. There's no way he could control them if they got inside. The student body would be generating so many emotions, it'd send them on a feeding frenzy."

"Scary thought." Solieyu murmured.

"Yeah."

"Look, we need to get back to our own compartment." Fred said. "We'll catch up to you before we get into the Great Hall, alright?"

"Alright. Seeya." Tonks said.

Once Fred and George were gone, the trio sat in silence for awhile. Harry was about to say something when Solieyu let out a loud gasp. Looking up, Harry and Tonks saw him jerking his head around, as if trying to see something that no one else could.

"S'wrong?" Tonks asked.

"It felt like someone just poured ice water down my back!" Solieyu hissed.

"What? What, you think someone's invisible and messing with you?" Tonks asked, raising her eyebrows.

"No, I think we've got a problem on our hands." Solieyu said, standing and walking to the window. It was unfortunate he picked that moment to do so, because the train began screeching as it was thrown into an abrupt braking run. Solieyu toppled over, crashing onto the seat

between Harry and Tonks. The train thudded to a halt and the lights all started to go out.

"Leon? ...What do you think this 'problem' is, exactly?" Harry asked, getting to his feet and looking out the window. "We're completely stopped... on the middle of a high bridge, no less... What's going--?"

Before Harry could finish his sentence, the strange, icy sensation hit him. And, judging from the expression on Tonks' face when he swung around, she had felt it, as well. The two looked to Solieyu, who had the compartment door open and was staring up and down the hall.

"See anything?" Tonks asked.

"No." Solieyu said, stepping back in and sliding the door closed once more.

"Should we wake him?" Harry asked, nodding to Lupin, who had somehow managed to both remain in place and not wake up.

"I think it would be wise to." Solieyu said.

"I think... we don't have that much time." Tonks whispered. The boys turned to look at her, but stopped when their eyes glanced past the door again. A black shadow was slowly gliding by it outside. It was tall, whatever it was, and it was wearing some kind of clothing that billowed, despite the distinct lack of wind inside the train.

Solieyu glanced over his shoulder.

At the same time, the tall figure stopped and slowly turned around. Tonks let out a squeak and scooted back against the far side of the compartment. Harry and Solieyu took up position in front of both her and Lupin, drawing their wands.

"How do you fight a Dementor?" Harry asked, quickly.

"You don't. The only way to is extremely difficult magic." Solieyu replied.

"So we're screwed then?"

"More or less."

The bony fingers of the figure slinked through the crack in the door, grabbed hold, and slowly pulled it open. The feeling of despair increased tenfold in Harry, hitting him so strongly that it became almost impossible to see anything but a blur. He was vaguely aware that someone shouted something and that Tonks lunged for him, but that was all he could make out before the darkness washed over him.

When he woke up, it was to three faces looming over him. Tonks was holding onto him, as if he might up and disappear if she let go. Solieyu was somewhere between hunched over in concern and looking around in a predatory manner. And the previously sleeping Lupin was quite awake and was holding out a chunk of what seemed to be chocolate. "Eat it." He said. "It'll help the feeling pass."

It took Harry a moment to readjust to his new position, but he reached out for the chocolate, anyway. Really not feeling like sweets at such a time, he only bit off a small portion of the chunk he was given. The effect it had was instantaneous, however. His body was filled with warmth once more and the haziness in his head began to clear, allowing him to think properly.

"What... just happened...?" He asked, his throat strangely sore.

"You fainted." Tonks said.

"I don't faint." Harry rasped.

"You just did." Solieyu said, walking to the door and peering out into the hall again.

"Last thing I remembered was the dementor opening the door..." Harry muttered, bringing a hand up to rub at his forehead, just below his scar. "I heard a woman scream and then... ...And then I guess I passed out..."

"No one screamed, Harry." Tonks said, slowly.

"What? I hear a woman screaming, really loudly, too... Neither of you heard it?" Harry asked, brow creasing.

Tonks and Solieyu shook their heads.

"It was probably the effect the dementors have..." Said the tired voice of Lupin. When the trio turned to look at him, he continued, "Dementors feed off of emotions, happy thoughts, and happy memories. It might have caused you to relive a particularly emotional moment in your life, Harry."

"But... no one I know screams like that." Harry said, frowning. "At least, I hope they don't..."

"Mm. Well, it may be something you've buried away in the back of your mind. In any case, all that matters is that the dementor is gone now." Lupin said.

"...Yeah, where *did* it go?" Harry asked, sitting up and finishing off the chocolate.

"He pointed his wand at it, some silver stuff shot out of it, and it made the dementor bolt like it was deathly afraid of it or something." Tonks said.

"It's the only thing that can drive them away." Lupin explained. "Unfortunately, I'm not very good at using it."

"Good enough to keep us safe." Solieyu said, sitting back down next to the man.

"Indeed." Lupin said, offering a half smile. "Feeling better there, Harry?"

"Much, thanks." Harry said, hefting himself up onto the seat. Tonks sat back next to him, keeping close to him just in case.

The train's lights flickered back to life, as did the Hogwarts Express itself moments later. Of course, talk of what had happened filled the train's halls. Rumors spread very quickly at Hogwarts. Given that the train was considerably smaller than the castle, they spread that much faster.

And so it came to be, half an hour later, that Malfoy and his two goons showed up at the door of Harry's compartment.

"Oh goody." Tonks droned. "Look, Harry. It's Malfoy. The trip couldn't possibly get any better now."

"Shut your mouth." Malfoy spat. Turning to look at Harry, smirk back in place, he asked, "So, is it true? Did the brave Harry Potter faint at the sight of the big, bad dementor?"

"Shut up, Malfoy." Harry sighed.

"Or you'll do what? Tell a professor?" Malfoy chuckled. Behind him, Crabbe and Goyle laughed along dumbly.

"Good idea." Tonks said. Turning, she asked, "Professor Lupin, would you kindly tell Malfoy to sod off?"

Clearing his throat, Lupin looked towards the blonde at the door. "I'm afraid I can't officially do anything until we're at Hogwarts... though I can recommend that Mr. Malfoy and his associates not do anything that could get themselves into trouble."

"And who are you?" Malfoy asked, looking at Lupin's tattered robes and haggard appearance in mild disgust.

"New Defense Against the Dark Arts professor." Solieyu explained. "Professor, this would be Draco Malfoy, Vincent Crabbe, and Gregory Goyle."

Lupin nodded as each of the Slytherins were pointed out. "I see. Well, if you're anything like your father, I'm sure you'll know when not to act improperly, Mr. Malfoy."

Glaring, Malfoy tilted his head slightly and jerked it to the left. This seemed to be indication to leave, as the three turned and headed back to wherever they had come from. Tonks hopped up and shut the compartment door again, muttering under her breath about Slytherins and hair gel.

"Thanks." Harry said. "I honestly don't feel up to a verbal spar with the idiot right now."

"Understandable. Lucius Malfoy was no prince, either." Lupin said, chuckling softly.

"You know his father?" Solieyu asked. "...I'm terribly sorry."

"Mm, I do, unfortunately. We were in Hogwarts together around the same time. Of course, he was a Slytherin." Lupin said.

"And you?" Solieyu asked.

"Ahh, I was in Gryffindor." Said Lupin, glancing out the window and smiling faintly. "Some of the best years of my life were spent in that tower..."

"It's good to have a kind professor for once." Harry said, making a face.

"Yes, I've heard there's been a rather bad streak of luck in the position I'm to fill." Lupin said.

"Rumor has it that it's cursed." Harry said, slumped against the wall and grinning. "First year, our Defense teacher had the unfortunate condition of having Lord Voldemort coming out of the back of his head. Last year, our Defense professor was eaten by the basilisk that I had to deal with. ...Been meaning to have a word with Professor Dumbledore 'bout that..."

Lupin looked rather confused. "I'm sorry, I... didn't quite catch all of that."

"Would you like the long version or the short one?" Harry asked.

"I'd like the one with the most information." Lupin said.

"Long version, then."

For the next hour or so, the trio explained to Lupin of their previous two years at Hogwarts and how utterly insane they had been. Harry

felt thoroughly exhausted after retelling the story of his second year and the giant, infuriating mystery it had been to him. Lupin actually *looked* exhausted by the time the story was finished.

"Good lord." He said. "What on earth is Albus thinking?"

"That's the problem..." Harry muttered. "I'm not sure he *does* think... at least not coherently. Must be his old age."

"I'm not so sure." Lupin said. "Albus always was a bit odd. Brilliant, but odd, nonetheless."

"...Professor?" Harry began.

"Yes?"

"You said you knew Lucius Malfoy when he was in school... Wouldn't that mean you were in school around when my parents were...?" Harry asked.

"Mm, indeed I was." Lupin said, smiling.

"Did you know them?"

"Your parents, Harry, became two of the closest friends I had." Said Lupin.

"Really...?"

"Really."

"Could you tell me anything about them? I'm afraid...I don't know much." Harry said, glancing off.

Lupin frowned. "Aren't you living with Lily's sister? It came up briefly when I talked with Albus about the job. Surely she's told you about your mother, at least..."

The trio exchanged dark looks with one another.

"...Long version or short version?" Harry asked again.

"I'm not going to like this, am I?" Lupin asked.

"Probably not." Tonks said.

"Well... we've still got a bit of time left. Let's hear the long version, then." Said Lupin.

And with that, Harry launched into how he had been living ever since his parents' death.

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Author's Notes: Jump Superstars can be blamed for this one's lateness. And my general laziness. Next one's gonna take a bit, too, since I'm gonna hafta siddown and plan out the next five chapters. I'm happy. Only MINOR changes happened from the 5-chapter writer's guide I started and what I actually wrote. 5 chapters at a time is a good idea, since I change things on the fly quite often.

So yeah. Train chapter! Plus we get some early Lupin-to-Harry discussions! Rest assured, his reaction will be at the beginning of the next chapter somewhere. Was originally gonna write to the point where the train pulls into the station, but I figured it'd make a better opener than a closer, so... yeah.

Not much to say, really. I'm dead tired, I've got a ninja mouse somewhere in here that can escape from traps somehow, and I've gotta try sleeping with it making odd noises here and there.

I think I'm gonna search the Code Lyoko section of FFN, see if I can't find something appropriately relaxing. Those small sections are always a crapshoot. I know what I want to look for, but rarely do I ever find what I'm looking for. Nurrr...

Next day, post-update update: I DID actually find what I was looking for. Kinda. Only three apparently in existance, and all of them were short. Bah...

Also, I just realized - this chapter is the longest one in book 3 so far. Huh...

Chapter 6 – Familiar Realm

"That's unbelievable. And you've told this to Albus?"

"Many times."

Remus Lupin shook his head. "Well, if it makes any difference, I'll talk to him. I have to admit, he can be stubborn often... But he's good to his students."

"Yeah, real good." Tonks muttered, staring out the window. "That's why he let *us* handle last year's problem."

"And the one the year before." Harry chimed in.

"He was away that time. You can't exactly blame him." Solieyu said.

"Yeah, well... I still had to fight that weird Quirrell-Voldemort hybrid on my own." Harry scowled.

"Hopefully the black sheep of the family doesn't decide to pay a visit, eh?" Tonks asked, cheerfully patting Harry on top of the head.

Making a face and swatting her hand away, Harry replied, "Yes, well, if he does, it's par for the course, isn't it? I wonder why everything waits until around the end of the school year..."

"Fate loves a good story." Solieyu offered.

"I assume you've heard the news, Professor." Tonks said, looking over at Lupin.

A dark shadow crossed Lupin's already drawn face. It quickly passed, though Solieyu shot the man another strange glance. "Yes, I have. Albus informed me directly, in fact. I've been... keeping myself away from news in general as of late."

"Why's that?" Tonks asked.

"Ahh, I can't explain that." Lupin said, offering the girl a smile. "Albus likes his secrets, you see."

"Mm, so he does." Harry said.

"I must admit, Harry, I was expecting you to look a bit more... ah... fleshed out, shall we say." Lupin began, smiling crookedly. "I was also sort of hoping you would have been Sorted to Gryffindor."

"That stupid hat tried to put me everywhere." Harry said, grumbling quietly. "First Slytherin, then Gryffindor... I'm pretty sure it would've suggested Hufflepuff too, if I hadn't gotten antsy."

"Harry, look!" Tonks suddenly said, tugging at Harry's sleeve. Glancing over at her, he caught sight of Hogwarts castle in the distance. The train ride was finally coming to a close.

"Well, I need to be ready to leave as soon as the Express comes to a halt. I still have some business to attend to before the Sorting begins." Lupin said, getting to his feet and grabbing his suitcase. "I'm afraid, as staff, we aren't allowed to show favoritism towards students... so be aware that, once on school grounds, I'll be behaving the same as any other professor there..."

Nodding, Harry replied, "I know. It was nice meeting you, Professor."

"Yeah, thanks for saving us from that Dementor." Tonks added. "Hope nothin' bad happens to you!"

"You just jinxed it." Solieyu commented.

"Oh, hush up." Tonks said, sticking out her tongue.

Chuckling, Lupin slid open the compartment door. "Well, I certainly hope nothing bad happens to me, either. And I hope my classes prove to be considerably more enlightening than those you've had for the past two years."

And with that, he was gone, leaving the three sitting in relative silence. Eventually, the train's brakes activated and the familiar screeching could be heard throughout. And, right on cue, there was a rush of activity in the train's corridors. It seemed to be tradition to get out of your compartment before the Express was fully stopped. Harry had no earthly idea of why.

"Shall we join the chaos?" Tonks asked.

"Oh, why not?" Harry said, standing. "It's not like we're going to be doing anything else in here."

"I'll be waiting for awhile, I think." Solieyu said, crossing his legs and smiling knowingly at his friends. "I saw a Hufflepuff run up the hallway a minute ago. His head was a giant tangerine. I'm not going to willingly throw myself into Fred and George Weasley's shot path."

Harry and Tonks looked at one another, then down to Solieyu. Nodding once, then two backed up and sat back down where they had been. Not a minute later, a burst of pinkish light flittered past. The cry of an older girl rang out, followed by one of the twins swearing and calling out, "Sorry, Angelina! Didn't mean to remove those!"

A pair of blue knickers soared past the compartment window.

Unable to keep the grin from his face, Harry turned to Tonks and started to say something. Figuring she knew perfectly well what it was going to be about, she grabbed him by the lips and gave him a withering glare. "Don't. You. Dare."

Harry let out a disappointed 'aww' around Tonks' fingers. When she let go, Harry jutted his lower lip out. "I wasn't going to say anything bad! Honest! I was just going to ask who you thought they perfected that one on."

Tonks blinked. Tilting her head in confusion, a look of horror slowly dawned on her face.

A few compartments down, Remus Lupin had just opened the door leading off the train when an odd noise filled his ears. He couldn't be sure, but it sounded like a girl screaming the word 'ew' as loudly as humanly possible.

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The return to Hogwarts was refreshing for Harry. Despite his bad luck the previous two years, he still felt safer there than anywhere else in the world. The Sorting was interesting as always, with Harry already

wondering when he was as small as the frightened first-years coming in. Gryffindor gained the most new recruits that year, topping Hufflepuff by a good half dozen.

Harry had noticed that Snape kept shooting Lupin vile glares during the Welcoming Feast, but he paid little mind to it. It wasn't like Snape to act that way towards another member of staff, but he glared at everyone else - what did one more person matter?

After everyone had finished eating, Dumbledore gave his typical start of term speech. This year included a bit about being careful when out on school ground. It seemed as though a good portion of the student body was somewhat unnerved by Sirius Black's escape. Dumbledore promised that everyone would be safe in and around the school... but he had done that so often, Harry didn't believe him one bit.

If the headmaster couldn't find a dirty great snake in the school, what chance did he have of finding a deranged man? The fact that Dementors were almost swarming the bloody grounds did little to reassure anyone. Half of the people seemed to be more frightened of the Azkaban guards than of a possible attack by Black.

Once opening ceremonies were over with, students began filtering out of the Great Hall. Classes wouldn't be starting for Harry and his friends until evening the following day, so they could afford to stay up a bit late and talk with each other. Wanting to escape the admiring stares of the Ravenclaw firsties, they decided to head up to their still-secret tower, the Raven's Nest.

"I wonder if I could rig up some beds in here or something." Harry wondered aloud as he leaned back against the stone wall. "Or at least some cushions. This place could do with some more comfort to it."

"I second it. When we learn enough Transfiguration to pull it off, let's dress the Nest up!" Tonks said, sitting down next to Harry.

Solieyu was outside, leaning against the tower's rail and staring up at the sky, a strange expression on his face.

"Right, you've been acting off since we got on the train. Mind filling us in, Leon?" Tonks asked, voice dry.

"Hmm? Oh, it's nothing, really." Solieyu said, glancing back over his shoulder. Seeing Tonks' doubtful expression, he continued, "It's just... something felt odd about Professor Lupin."

"He's normal. Of course something would seem odd about him. Last two professors weren't exactly shining examples, were they?" Tonks replied, leaning against Harry. "I refuse to believe the Golden Snake-snack was normal."

"You sure you aren't misreading him, Leon?" Harry asked, blushing faintly when he felt Tonks' weight shift against his left side. "He knew my parents... said he and my dad got on well. I don't think dad would choose sketchy friends."

"Perhaps. But do you really know he was a friend of your father's? Who's saying that he isn't just weaving a lie to get closer to you?" Solieyu asked, turning around to look at his friends. "It wouldn't be the first time a professor's tried to murder you, you know."

"I know, I know." Harry said, waving his only free hand vaguely. "But... still. I'd like to give him a chance. He's the first Defense professor that's actually been nice. Unless he's some sort of monster in class, I don't see any reason to dislike him so far."

Shrugging, Solieyu tilted his head back to stare up at the night sky. "If you say so. But I still think there's something distinctly... feral... about him. I just wish I knew what."

"Feral? He looks like he could fall asleep standing up. In a hail storm." Tonks said. "You sure you aren't still recovering from your attack?"

"Very." Scowled Solieyu. "My senses don't lie to me. Mark my words, something's not right here, Harry. I'm not telling you how you should feel about him, just. be cautious. It would help if he could produce some sort of *proof* that he was friends with your parents, of course. Wizarding photographs are almost impossible to tamper with."

Harry paused, an odd look in his eyes. "...Hey, yeah! He might have some pictures of mum and dad! I've only ever seen them once. And that was in the Mirror back in my first year. I'd like to know how they looked... to see if the Mirror was lying to me or not."

"Hopefully you can talk to him about that without the involvement of Dementors." Solieyu said, looking over his shoulder and down at the school grounds. "I can't believe Dumbledore is allowing so many. Safety is one thing. There must be more than a hundred of those foul things gliding around."

"At least they can't fly." Tonks commented.

"A flying Dementor?" Harry asked. "Well that would look pretty stupid, wouldn't it?"

A moment passed.

"Anyway, after the first week of classes is up, I'll try pulling him aside and asking. Hopefully he won't mind." Harry continued.

"I don't see why he would." Tonks said. "He didn't seem mean-spirited at all. He must have a couple photos laying around."

"It'd be nice if I got to keep one." Harry said, more to himself than either of his friends.

"It's getting late." Solieyu murmured. "And unless you want to carry Tonks back to Ravenclaw Tower, we should get going."

"M'perfectly fine." Tonks said, pouting. Her pout was interrupted by a yawn, which caused Harry to chuckle. She hmphed and stuck out her tongue at him. "Not a word, Potter. Not a word."

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"You know, Tonks..." Harry began, walking alongside his friend. "I'd like to think that we're fairly intelligent..."

"If we weren't, we'd be kicked out of Ravenclaw. I should hope you think that way." Said Tonks, glancing aside.

"So answer me something, eh?"

"What?"

"Why in the name of Merlin's bristling nose hairs are we taking Divination?" Harry asked, slouching somewhat.

"Because we have nothing better to do." Answered Solieyu in Tonks' stead. "And because it'll keep *you* from trying to overthink everything in creation."

"I don't--" Harry began, straightening up so he could glare at his friend at eye level. Tonks, however, sent him a look that clearly meant 'Yes you do, now behave.'

Harry settled on scowling instead.

"Okay, fine. But out of all the electives we could've chosen, why Divination?" Harry asked.

Solieyu shrugged. "Because the twins said it was easy?"

"All we have to do is keep predicting our own deaths, apparently." Tonks chimed in, grinning crookedly. "After what we've been through since arriving here, I don't think we need to try terribly hard at that, do you?"

"Okay, point for your side, then." Harry said, making a face. "Still don't like it. You know, I don't think I've even seen this Professor Trelawney. What's she do, get her meals delivered by house elves or something? Why's she never in the Great Hall?"

"Third Eye affecting her normal vision? I dunno. Ask Fred and George, they're more likely to know than I am." Tonks said.

"If you two are quite done." Solieyu interrupted, clearing his throat before speaking. "We're here."

And indeed they were. After a fair amount of upward slopes and odd staircases, they had finally arrived at the ladder that lead up and into Professor Trelawney's classroom, such as it was. They were at a

dead end, with nowhere to go but up. Harry glanced at the ladder, then went over to the nearest window to take a peek outside. After letting out a low whistle, he walked back over.

"Betcha her knees are bad or something. Maybe she had an accident after getting up into there and now she can't get down." Harry suggested.

"Magic, Harry." Solieyu and Tonks commented in unison.

"Right. Sorry. Mouth before my brain that time." Harry said. "Okay, I'll go on up first, then. Might as well get it out of the way. Plus I'd really appreciate there being someone to catch me if something odd happens."

"Just because I fell on you a time or two doesn't mean you get to fall on me!" Tonks said, eyeballing Harry suspiciously. "You watch your step."

"Yes, ma'am." Harry replied, rolling his eyes as he started up the ladder.

The room looked as if it had escaped from the 70s without a fight. There was a strange smokey mist in the air, which Harry could only hope wasn't going to somehow make him want to peer into teacups all day. The only places to sit, it would seem, were on giant, devour-you-whole cushions of sorts, which were scattered all around the room. Harry took the one nearest the entrance.

"Whatcha sittin' back here for?" Asked Tonks as she and Solieyu followed him up and in. "Don't want to be front row for what's probably going to be a train wreck?"

"I want to be able to leap down the escape hatch if she tries to predict my death." Harry deadpanned. "By all means, go sit up front, where she can get at you."

"Oh, come on. It can't be *that* back, can it?" Tonks asked.

"Well, here she comes. You tell me." Harry said in a quieter tone.

And indeed, Professor Trelawney had chosen that moment to come gliding in from a door on the opposite side of the room. She had on robes that more resembled a multi-layered dressing gown, her hair was wild and puffed up, and she had glasses so thick that Harry wondered if she was wearing goggles.

"My vision's bad." He whispered as Tonks slumped down on the cushion beside him. "She has to be legally blind."

As Solieyu sat on a neighboring cushion, he leaned aside and whispered, "Who catches her if she tumbles out a window?"

"You can, since you're so worried about it." Harry returned, smirking.

"Good day, class." Said Trelawney, dreamily. "And welcome to Divination..."

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"First order of business - We find Fred and George." Harry said.

"Check." Said Tonks.

"Second order of business - We string them up by their underwear."

"Check."

"Third order of business - We pray that fruit bat runs headlong into a bludger."

"Check!"

"It wasn't *that* bad." Solieyu said, raising an eyebrow.

"Yeah, well, she didn't spend the whole blasted class predicting how many ways *you* were going to die this year, now did she?" Harry asked.

Solieyu shrugged. "I thought she was getting pretty creative towards the end."

"Yeah," Tonks said, grinning. "I'd almost like to see a large meteor break through all the floors of the school and land on your head in Potions class just to see if it was possible."

"I hate you both."

Tonks giggled. "Oh cheer up, gloomypants."

"Why? We're leaving a smoke-encased tower of babbling idiocy and heading out to a class taught by Hagrid, where something's liable to eat our faces." Harry said.

"Do you honestly think they'd let him have anything dangerous?" Solieyu asked.

"Neither of you looked out the windows before leaving, did you?" Harry muttered, glancing aside.

Tonks and Solieyu exchanged a look. The girl shook her head slowly.

Harry just smiled in reply.

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"...Is that what I think it is?" Solieyu asked, taking a step back.

"Mmhmm." Harry said.

"Why did they let him have one of *those*?" Tonks squeaked.

"Dunno. Wonder if Trelawney's watching on from her tower. Y'know, to see if it really *does* eat my face." Harry wondered aloud, craning his head to peer up towards the Divination tower.

"Look on the bright side." Tonks said, stepping closer to Harry. "Maybe it'll decide Malfoy looks like dinner."

"We should be so lucky." Harry mumbled.

There was still a little while until class began, and all the students had started to get a bit restless. Including Solieyu, who kept glancing towards the Forbidden Forest and pacing slightly.

"What's up?" Tonks finally asked.

"It's... I'm not sure, to be honest. Something in that forest is unsettling to me, though." Solieyu said, tilting his head slightly. "I've always felt like something was in that place, watching me. Ever since I first came here, in fact."

"That's weird." Harry said, looking past his friend to the woods. "Is it... y'know... something evil?"

"I...wouldn't say evil, per se..." Solieyu started. "More like...cautious. I don't know how to explain better than that. Not without knowing what's actually residing in there."

"Ah, it'll pass." Tonks said. "Try and relax a bit. I don't think it'd be a good idea to be nervous around *that* thing." She motioned towards the creature that Hagrid had prepared.

"I'll try."

A few minutes later and everyone had gathered outside of the hut. The large man was off a ways, having a quiet, intense conversation with a hippogriff. The winged creature seemed to be glaring at Hagrid, as if it wanted to be around the students as much as they wanted to be around it. In the end, Hagrid straightened up and decided to wave the class over rather than trying to bring the hippogriff over to them.

"Sorry 'bout tha'." Said Hagrid, glancing over his shoulder. "Seems like 'e's got a bit o' stage fright, if ya get my meaning..."

And so, another class begun. Hagrid taught the students the proper way to approach a Hippogriff. Harry, of course, was pushed into actually getting *on* it, however. And, while he very much enjoyed flying around on his broom, he didn't quite like sitting on the back of a feral creature that would just as soon bite his nose off than look at him.

But he had made it through the ordeal with his life intact. Tonks enveloped him in a tight hug once he staggered his way back over to her and Solieyu. A few more students, encouraged by Harry's

success, began stepping up to the hippogriff, which Hagrid kept referring to as 'Buckbeak.' Things were running remarkably smooth, a fact that didn't pass Harry by. He knew better than to expect a class with Slytherins to go properly. But as time passed, Harry began to wonder if someone had the whole of Slytherin house under some kind of obedience charm.

And no sooner had the thought passed through his head did it happen. Draco Malfoy, jerking his arm away from Pansy Parkinson's grasp, sauntered up to Buckbeak, a smug expression on his face. Harry glanced sideways at the group of Slytherins he had been in the midst of. Most were glaring at the blonde. Even Pansy looked rather disgusted with him.

Harry heard, rather than saw, the events that unfolded next. By the time Malfoy had let out his girly shriek and Harry looked back, Hagrid was already scooping him up. Buckbeak had been tied back down and, as the large man rushed the blonde towards the school, Harry only barely made out high-pitched whimpers.

"Wow, I was almost right." Tonks marvelled, watching Hagrid leave. "Shame he was around to keep the hippogriff away, eh?"

"Yeah. We could've been out one nuisance." Harry said, eyes wide. He looked over at Buckbeak, who was still keeping a wary eye on the students. The two locked eyes for a brief moment and, as Harry slipped his hands into his pockets, he smirked. "Well, class was dismissed, then. What say we go find Fred and George?"

"Why? Planning to make things even worse for him?" Came a female voice that definitely wasn't Tonks'. Harry looked away from his friends to see Pansy Parkinson and the other Slytherins passing by.

"I doubt the big ponce was even hurt. Probably faking it to get attention." Harry replied, cocking an eyebrow.

A smirk crossed Pansy's face. "Yes, probably. Be that as it may, you and your Gryffindor friends had better keep your noses out of his business, Potter. We wouldn't want anything *bad* to happen, after all."

"Is that a threat?" Harry asked, narrowing his eyes.

"Take it however you want." Replied Pansy with a one-sided shrug. "But if you're really as smart as you think you are, you'll know when not to get involved."

"Parkinson, if I could arrange it, I'd never have to even *look* at Malfoy again, let alone exchange words with him." Harry said, shaking his head. "If he would leave me be, I would leave *him* be."

"I'm afraid it's not that simple, Potter." Pansy said, turning to head back to the group that was still waiting. "Not all things are as simple as day and night."

"And what's *that* supposed to mean?" Harry asked.

"You're a Ravenclaw. Figure it out on your own." Pansy said. And then, addressing the other Slytherins, she murmured, "Come on. He'll be wondering where we are."

Watching the Slytherins leave, Harry removed his hands from his pockets and crossed his arms. "What the bloody hell was *that* about?"

"Best not to try and work out how they do things." Solieyu supplied, passing by Harry and resting his hand on his shoulder briefly. "It'll only give you a headache. Come on. Let's go get the twins."

"Oh, you're wanting in on it now?" Tonks asked.

"Not particularly. But I think that stuff that was wafting around her classroom is messing up my senses." Solieyu said, making a face. "I can still smell that smoke."

"You two go find the twins." Harry said, rubbing at the bridge of his nose. "I think I need some fresh air and silence for awhile. I'll be up in the Nest if anyone needs me."

"Alright." Tonks said. "We'll go wiffle the Weasleys with a toilet seat and meet up with you there. What a good way to start the year."

"Yeah." Said Harry. "Why do I have this feeling that things won't stay peaceful for long?"

"You call all of this peaceful, do you?" Tonks asked, spreading her arms wide.

"Considering nothing's tried killing me yet? I'll take what I can get." Harry said, smiling crookedly.

"Good point."

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Author's Notes: Oh jeez. This is late as can be, isn't it? Toldja I hadn't dropped it. I wrote over 300kb twice in the span of like two weeks, though. Making a Rockman.EXE walkthrough for the website I work at (see my profile for a link, if you're interested) and it just completely burned me out. I'm still feeling pretty out of it. But at least I finished this one, huh? I'm sorry it isn't longer, given how long you guys had to wait for the damn thing.

I AM looking forward to chapter 7 - Lupin's first class! And you guys know what THAT means - Boggarts! What do you think Tonks' is going to be? Or Leon's? Ought to be interesting.

And speaking of - I hope no one minded me adding an exchange between Pansy and Harry. I need to set up... certain events for further down the road. And no, I won't tell you what.

I'd like to write at least one more chapter between now and Xmas, because I now damn well that once the 24th rolls around, I'll be giving games my time again. Animal Crossing: Wild World and Mario Kart DS, mainly. Oi. My notes for chapter 7 are actually really short. Meaning I could either work in random stuff or have a complete writer's block moment again.

So yeah. I really hate that it's been SO LONG since I last updated, but my responsibilities to TUS come first. But the guides are done now and, marring any small revisions I need to make, I won't be writing anything for the site for a good while.

That's my explanation. Like it or hate it.

Chapter 7 – Blackout

"There is no way in hell I'm going back to either of those classes." Harry stated.

Tonks and Solieyu looked up from the game of Exploding Snap they were playing. Or rather, the game that Tonks had annoyed Solieyu into playing with her. They were sitting in front of the chair that Harry usually occupied. The boy had been staring off into space for nearly half an hour before speaking. In fact, just as he spoke, Tonks was making a move in the game. The result of this, of course, was a lot of exploding.

Coughing, Tonks glared at her friend before replying, "Which two? Divination and Care of Magical Creatures?"

"Mm. Trelawney's absolutely batty and quite frankly, I'd rather not have to deal with both Hagrid *and* his mad menagerie." Harry said.

"A bit late for it, don't you think?" Solieyu asked, wiping his face clean. "I don't think you'll be allowed to switch classes."

"I care try." Harry said, a scowl on his face.

"Well you'll have to take something in their places." Tonks said. "Anything planned there?"

"I'd like to look into Arithmancy, to be quite honest." Harry admitted.

"Ugh. I know we're Ravenclaws and all, but that's still more thinking than I'd like to put in. Never was good with numbers." Tonks said.

"Anything else? You could probably take Muggle Studies and have an easy time of it." Said Solieyu. "...Meaning you'll probably take Ancient Runes and be done with it, right?"

Harry smiled.

"You know how bad the homework'll get in a few years, right?" Tonks asked, sweeping up the mess of cards. "And if neither of us try to transfer out, you won't have anyone to study with."

"I'll work something out." Harry said. "Besides, both subjects seem more interesting to me. I don't plan on taming dragons in the future. Nor do I plan to woo Muggles by pretending to be a spiritual medium. Besides, you two have seen my acting skills. I'd probably go on television, make an arse of myself, and get outted by some random skeptic."

There was a pause.

"In any case, I'm not going back to either class. I've killed Voldemort ... what, one proper times and then two half-assed versions of him? I've said the school both times. I don't think they're gonna say no to a simple class transfer. And if they do, I'll raise unholy hell."

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As it happened, Harry didn't need to throw any fits or call the staff on his saving their asses twice in a row now. After a lengthy discussion with Professor Flitwick, Harry was happily freed from both Divination and Care of Magical Creatures. Hagrid might have liked Harry being around, but Harry still couldn't shake the thought that it was because of that man that he had spent so many years being tortured at the hands of those supposed to be his family.

Harry had also been scheduled to speak with the professors of the classes he would be transferring into. Neither had any objections, as it was still so early in the school year, and Harry was able to catch up on the reading almost immediately. Things went smoothly for the next few days. Tonks and Solieyu were the first to catch Malfoy after the Buckbeak incident - they reported that he was hamming up his injury as expected.

Slytherins, in fact, were the only part of his new classes that he didn't like. Harry knew that both classes were much more important in the grand scheme of things than the two he had dropped, and shouldn't have been surprised at just how many Slytherins were in them. An almost abnormal amount of Slytherins were in Arithmancy. The amount in Ancient Runes was thankfully smaller, though it did have one drawback that Arithmancy didn't - Pansy Parkinson.

Harry tried to focus on his work, but Pansy seemed to be much more adept at distracting him than Malfoy was. Harry didn't quite know how to wrap his brain around that one. She somehow managed to slip a good volley of magical fire curses at Harry's robes while Professor Graves' back was turned. Harry had managed to banish the flames before they could do anything, but it was the principle of the matter. Malfoy was more into bad pranks and outright sabotage. Pansy was trying to immolate him.

After a few days of this type of attack, Harry stormed into the Great Hall and made a bee-line for the Gryffindor table. Standing in front of Fred and George, who he had detailed matters to after the first attack, he gritted his teeth and let loose a single command: "Strike."

And strike the twins did. The following day, Pansy didn't show up to Ancient Runes, much to Harry's relief. Unfortunately, as he was leaving the classroom, she sprung from the shadows of a nearby doorway. Not expecting an ambush, Harry was caught offguard and pulled inside the small room she had been waiting in.

"What the hell are-- whoa." Harry began. He stopped when he got a good look at just what the Weasleys had done to her.

Pansy's hair was neon yellow and spiked more than Harry thought would be possible. Her left eye was pink and her right was rainbow-colored. Her skin had a distinctly green tint to it, almost as if she had been getting sick. Her fingers were gnarled and covered in warts, looking like a stereotypical fairy tale witch's would. When she snarled at him, Harry could see that her teeth had become discolored and broken.

Pansy Parkinson was not a happy camper.

"YOU..." Pansy began, seething as she tried to form a coherent sentence.

"Yes, me." Harry replied. "You know, the one you've been trying to light on fire the whole time I've been in Ancient Runes."

Her left eye twitching in an interesting way, Pansy quickly closed the distance between the two of them and, seemingly in one breath,

exploded. "If you don't find your two helper monkeys and get them to reverse the damage they've done, I'll personally see to it that you're never able to have children, Potter! I will make it my life's goal to make you miserable every moment of every day you live! If I don't get changed back by sundown, I'll go straight to Snape with this. You might be exempt from being expelled from the school but those two Gryffindors certainly *aren't*! I won't be humiliated in such a manner, Potter! I did good to get here without being seen and I'm going to *stay* here until they come to *fix* things!"

Harry gaped at the girl for a moment. After he had processed everything she had just hissed at him, he made a face. "I know every single thing they did to you, Parkinson. And I can reverse the changes."

"Then change me back to normal!" Pansy yelled.

"What's the magic word?" Harry asked, eyes wide in mock innocence.

"Don't you play games with me, Potter!" Spat Pansy.

"If I wanted to play games with you, I'd have stunned you and floated you along behind me as I headed down for dinner." Harry replied in a dry tone. "You don't even have your wand out and you're throwing threats? Did you even *notice* me drawing my wand? Or my pointing it at you?"

Pansy's head jerked down. Sure enough, Harry had his wand drawn and aimed at her, though both his arms were still by his side.

"And," Harry added, before Pansy could say anything else, "Might I add that it's *really* hard to take death threats seriously from someone who looks like you do right now, you bloody pu--"

Harry wasn't able to finish the word, as he was too busy wheezing. Harry might have had his wand out, but he wasn't expecting Pansy to make such a cheap shot with her knee. Apparently, she took being called a pug VERY seriously. As Harry slumped back against a wall, wand clattering to the floor, he glared up at Pansy between coughing fits.

Squatting down, Pansy smiled unapologetically at him as he curled up. "What's wrong? Don't tell me that even the great Harry Potter is affected by a good, swift hit to the groin. Why, what would your fan club think?"

"They'd be jealous that *you* were the first one to come in contact with my bits and would promptly hunt you down and lynch you." Harry growled, trying to force himself into a sitting position.

Pansy twitched again. "If you even think about trying to twist this into something it's not, I'll..."

"Oh, relax." Harry hissed around a groan. "It's not like I want anyone to know you hit me there, either. But the twins are sure to notice *something* wrong with me."

For the first time since she had pulled him into the room, a brief look of horror dawned on Pansy's face. It was gone in an instant, though, replaced by cool indifference. "I've already told you what I would do if you didn't reverse the effects those two caused. If they attack me again, it'll only help my cause."

Leaning his head back and closing his eyes to try and concentrate on something other than the pain, Harry murmured, "You know, I could've helped you before... but I don't think I'm going to be doing much of *anything* for the rest of the day. Which means that unless I get the twins and ask them to change you back, you'll be stuck like that until the spells wear off."

"Then I'll keep you here until you *are* feeling up to it. Neither of us leave this room until I'm back to looking how I used to." Pansy declared, standing back up and walking over to the door. After throwing a few locking and silencing spells at it, she spun around and leaned back against it.

"I despise you. You DO know that, right?" Harry growled, grabbing his wand and slowly getting back to his feet.

"Well aware and proud, thank you." Pansy replied.

"Aren't afraid I'm gonna hex you into a coma?" Harry asked, smirking weakly.

"You just said that you wouldn't be doing much of anything the rest of the day. Idle threat, Potter."

"Wanna tempt fate?"

"I don't believe in fate." Pansy said, voice suddenly icy. "Now shut up and heal so you can fix me."

"I don't think Dumbledore could fix *you*." Harry muttered. "As for reversing the spells the twins hit you with, I'm still waiting for that magic word."

"You can't be serious."

Harry's smirk widened.

"I'm not saying 'please' to you." Pansy stated, crossing her arms.

"S'wrong, Parkinson? Scared to show a side that *doesn't* scream evil and pathetic?"

"Evil am I? And this 'prank' wasn't?"

"You kept slinging fire spells at me!" Harry cried.

"It was amusing." Pansy said, shrugging.

"And this was amusing to them." Harry retorted.

"Yes, but you could stop *my* spells." Pansy said, glaring at Harry once more. "I can't figure out what the hell those two have done to me, so I *can't* end them!"

"I daresay no one would be able to figure out their custom spells." Harry said. "I wouldn't if they didn't give me intimate detail about all the new stuff they think up."

"That's fascinating and all, Potter, but can we get back to the point here?" Pansy asked.

"Fine." Harry said, straightening up. He was still feeling the hurt, but at least he felt like he could end the twins' reign of terror without any side effects. Making a few wide waving motions, Harry mumbled something under his breath and a beam of silver light shot from the tip of his wand, striking Pansy in the chest. The Slytherin let out a surprised yelp, but stopped a hex in mid-cast when she saw that her hands were back to normal.

"...The rest of me better look normal, too." She said, tugging a strand of hair around to look at it. Sure enough, it was back to its original color. Which, at the very least, caused her to relax slightly.

"As normal as you ever did." Harry said, shrugging. "I'm not a miracle worker."

"Yes, now if only the rest of the world would take that stance on your abilities." Said Pansy, turning and despelling the door.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Harry asked, walking over as best he could.

"You know exactly what it means." Pansy replied. "You've had to have noticed how many people seem to be a part of your little fan club, Potter. Even *you* can't possibly be so blind as to miss it. It extends beyonds Hogwarts' grounds, you know. Sickening, really."

"I never asked for any of this!" Harry spat venomously, causing Pansy to jump slightly. "Do you think I *like* being targetted and singled out? Do you think it was fun to see Voldemort sticking out of Quirrell's head? Do you think it was fun being chased around by a dirty great snake? Do you think that it's *nice* knowing that Sirius Black is apparently out for my blood? Do you think I want throngs of fans screaming my name and asking for autographs, Parkinson?"

During his rant, Harry had acted similarly to Pansy, stalking forth and closing the gap between them. By the time he finished, his face was inches from hers. "Don't think you have me worked out. And don't you ever threaten me or my friends again. I've killed the Dark Lord you and your little parasite Housemates all look up to on three occasions now. Do you really think any of *you* pose a serious threat to me?"

Harry had never blown up at anyone before, much less some stupid Slytherin who happened to get in a cheap shot. But, as he stood there fuming, enjoying the look of sheer shock on Pansy's face, he felt something lift from his chest. Something he figured had been building up for awhile. And, unable to find an outlet, it had just kept bottled up.

"Move, Pansy." Harry whispered. The use of her first name more than the quiet tone he had used caused the girl to jump out of her shock. She did as he commanded, stepping off to the side and allowing him to freely exit the room. As he opened the door, he glanced aside at her and, before leaving, added, "And you're welcome."

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Harry's encounter with Pansy Parkinson had shot his entire week to hell. Tonks had tried getting him to tell them what was wrong the rest of the day, but he remained silent on the matter. He remained silent in general, as well, and seemed to slip into a daze when no one was speaking with him. When someone would shake him out of his trance and ask if he was okay, he would simply shrug in reply.

The following day, it was the first proper Defense Against the Dark Arts class. They had spent a few days going over what they *should* have rightly known by that point. It was a blissfully small amount of knowledge, mostly dealing with small monsters and the like. But when Lupin made the jump to the third years' proper work, it was noticeable. Though he tried to hide it behind a type of game, Harry could see through the man's attempts at keeping things from becoming too much like they had been in previous years.

"You may have noticed," Lupin began, putting a hand on an old dresser that was on its last legs. "That I've moved the desks to the side of the classroom. You've probably seen this dresser moving slightly. Would anyone care to guess what might be inside of it?"

A smattering of hands went into the air. One of them being Neville Longbottom's. Since Lupin had a lot to cover in a short period of time, it had been decided that classes would double-up until they were properly in their third year studies. Ravenclaw was thankfully paired

with Gryffindor, while the poor Hufflepuffs were forced to deal with the Slytherins.

"Yes, Mr. Longbottom?" Lupin said, nodding to the boy.

"Is it a boggart...?" Neville asked.

Lupin smiled. "Indeed it is. How did you know?"

"My gran found one in her closet once." Neville said, blinking wide eyes. "Not sure what she did with it, though..."

"Five points to Gryffindor. Now, can anyone else answer Neville for us? How might you go about getting rid of a boggart?"

Another small grouping of hands went up.

"Miss Granger?" Lupin said, nodding to her as he had to Neville.

"With the Riddikulus spell, sir." Hermione replied, quickly. She opened her mouth again, as if to continue further, but closed it and settled on looking satisfied. The side of Harry's mouth turned up. It was the first time he had seen or heard of Hermione Granger *not* spouting off an impressive amount of knowledge about something. She was just as smart as he was, if not smarter, and had really gained a lot of confidence in herself since their first year.

"Very good. Another five points to Gryffindor." Lupin said. And then, drawing his own wand, he continued, "The Riddikulus spell requires you to visualize your worst fear in an amusing way while speaking the incantation. For instance, if you were afraid of spiders, you could imagine a bright pink one with a large clown nose on its face. Makes the spider much less frightening... unless, of course, you have a natural fear of clowns."

Harry glanced aside at Tonks and Solieyu, then back to the Gryffindors. Ron Weasley, who had thankfully mellowed out a bit, was pale as could be. Harry smirked.

"Now then, we're going to face the boggart one at a time. When you step forward, the boggart will adjust itself to whatever you fear most

and will then move towards you. After it takes shape, you're to imagine that form in a silly or amusing manner and cast the spell. If done correctly, the boggart should retreat and target someone else. We'll continue in this way until everyone has had a chance, at which point I will step in and finish it off. Remember - laughter is the key here. Don't be afraid. I won't let anything happen to any of you. Just concentrate and you'll do fine." Lupin said. "Now then, everybody line up. Once you've performed the spell, step to the side and let the next person move."

Harry purposely moved to the very back of the line. In addition to not wanting anyone freaking out over what his darkest fears might be, he wanted to absorb what everyone else was frightened of most. A few spots ahead of him, Tonks was murmuring what sounded like words of encouragement to a very shaky Neville Longbottom. Solieyu was looking almost bored, as if he had already prepared.

And so it went. The students took turns exposing their deepest fears and then turning them on their heads. Large dragons became stuffed animals, snakes bit their own tails and rolled around as wheels, and Professor Snape was outfitted in old lady garb. The class had a good, long laugh at that. And even Harry, through his bitter phase, managed to crack a grin. When Tonks stepped up, the boggart whirled around numerous times before taking shape. This time, Harry *did* laugh. The boggart looked exactly like Tonks did in her natural state, when her hair and eyes were their normal colors. Only she was dressed just like Neville's grandmother, as well.

"Shut up!" Tonks whined. "I couldn't help it! I blame *YOU* for this!" She said, pointing an accusing finger at Neville, who was biting back a laugh of his own. Pouting, she walked over to Harry and settled on punching him in the arm. "You aren't allowed to laugh."

"Sorry. It was the clothing that did it." Harry murmured, keeping his voice quiet enough so that only she could hear. "You know I think you look nice like that otherwise."

Tonks shrugged, then nudged Harry and motioned for him to pay attention again. Solieyu was stepping up. Once more, the boggart whirled around. This time, a large, war-scarred centaur was formed. It

gnashed sharpened teeth down at Solieyu, who gave a look of mild indifference before performing the Riddikulus spell. The centaur's body was changed to that of a cow, with black spots, and a baby's pacifier popped into the creature's mouth. It blinked in surprise before resuming a shapeless form.

Harry's eyes were wide. The piece of the puzzle that Solieyu had ruthlessly kicked away from him over the summer did an about face and slammed back down. This time, however, things really *did* click. The potion, the lack of a transformation on the full moon, the weak stints... and now centaurs. Harry smirked triumphantly as Solieyu walked off to the side and back towards his friends. He caught Harry's eye and, with a nod, confirmed things. He then mouthed 'Halloween' and turned back to watch the next person challenge the boggart.

After a few more people, Harry was the only person left. Slipping his hands from his pocket and drawing his wand, Harry watched the boggart swirl about in midair. He looked off at Lupin, who looked tense. Harry couldn't blame him, really. Voldemort was probably going to form and scare the entire class half to death. But the Dark Lord wasn't what the boggart chose - it was a Dementor. Not prepared for the sudden rush of freezing cold air or the voices that were set off in his head, Harry stumbled backwards. Lupin rushed forward at the same time, roaring at the boggart to come to him, instead.

The boggart immediately changed into a glowing, white sphere that hovered high off the ground. The swarm of voices screaming in Harry's head subsided, leaving him with a migraine headache that showed no signs of going away. Lupin did as promised, finishing the boggart off. He then went to his desk and brought Harry a sizable portion of chocolate, ordering him to finish the whole thing before the end of class. Not really feeling hungry, Harry nibbled at it until the pain subsided enough for him to take larger bites.

Lupin asked for him to stay after class. So, as the others filed out, Harry walked up to the professor's desk.

"I thought your boggart would've been something else." Lupin commented.

"Voldemort. Yeah, me too." Harry said. "I guess it does make sense, though. I... I'm not sure why I just can't function around the Dementors..."

"You fear fear itself, Harry. There's no reason to question why. It's the most logical thing to be afraid of. Though I must admit, I've only seen a few have such a harsh reaction to them." Lupin said.

"I hear voices in my head when they're close." Harry said, not meeting Lupin's eyes. "I...I'm pretty sure it's my mum, yelling at Voldemort..."

"You heard Lily...?" Lupin asked, brow creased.

"I think so." Harry said. "...It's weird. I've wanted to hear her voice for so long. But not like this. Not hearing her final moments over and over again." He shuddered, then continued, "Professor... is there any way to... I dunno, banish a Dementor?"

"...Something like that." Lupin said, eyeing Harry cautiously. "But it's very advanced magic. Even full grown wizards have trouble learning it."

"Yes, well, I'm not exactly normal... I'd like to at least give it a shot. Can you teach me the spell, Professor?" Harry asked.

"I don't know, Harry. I'll have to speak with Professor Dumbledore about this." Lupin stated.

Harry nodded. "Please do. I can't keep getting hung up when they're around. I want to do something about it."

"I'll speak with him tonight then. But I promise nothing, Harry. Understood?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

Lupin nodded. "You're free to go now, Harry."

Harry nodded as well, turning and heading for the door. Before he left, he looked over his shoulder and said, "And Professor? Thanks for getting it away from me. It was bad enough on the train. I didn't need to black out in front of everyone like that."

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Sighing, Harry climbed the stairs, heading back towards Ravenclaw Tower. He had told Tonks and Solieyu to go on ahead of him. The chocolate had definitely helped him out, but he still had a faint buzzing in his head and a slight pressure behind his eyes that just refused to go away. Climbing the stairs wasn't exactly helping, either. His week just wasn't going on very well and, mentally laughing, Harry wondered if Sirius Black was going to attack somehow before it was over.

So off in his thoughts was he that he didn't notice someone storming up behind him. It wasn't until he got shoved into an empty classroom that he snapped back to reality, instinctively pulling his wand and rounding on his attacker.

"...Parkinson? Damn it all, I've had a bad day. What do *you* want?" Harry groused.

"I want you to keep away from me." Pansy stated.

Harry boggled. "You want me to keep away from you. So you push me into a classroom and shut the door behind us? Well, I can see why *you* weren't sorted into Ravenclaw."

"And may we all be thankful for that." Pansy spat. She walked up to Harry and jabbed him sharply in the chest. "You get the point, Potter. You *and* your little gang of suckups keep away from me. Got it?"

"Suckups? I'm not like your dear Draco, Parkinson." Harry said, swatting her hand away. "I'm actually *nice* to the people around me."

"Whatever you'd like to fool yourself into believing, Potter." Pansy said. "Just keep clear."

"Parkinson, if I never had to look at your face again, I would perform a little jig in front of the entire blasted school." Harry stated. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I was on my way back to the common room when you so rudely sidetracked me."

"Not so fast! I'm not letting you get in the last word twice!" Pansy snarled, rounding on Harry and pushing him back into the wall, her wand drawn and trained on his chest. "You aren't going to dress me down then leave again! Don't think you're the only one who people can't work out, Potter. You aren't the only person here who wishes they could escape the life they've been thrown into. So don't you DARE talk down to me! And don't you ever assume anything about me again or I'll make sure you regret it!"

"Oh? And what did I assume incorrectly? That you look like a pug? That you're self-centered? That you'd fit right in amongst Voldemort's other faceless drones? I bet that if he magically came back to life, you'd be one of the first people kneeling before him." Harry spat back, having no intention of stepping down and letting the Slytherin girl yell at him.

"And I suppose you would be there the moment he returned, waiting to once more smite him in the name of holy justice or whatever. Right?" Pansy asked, smiling sweetly at Harry.

"It's not my fault the idiot keeps *finding* me!" Harry cried. "If I could go the rest of my life without you or Voldemort, not only would I do a stupid little jig in front of the entire school, I'd let Fred and George pick my outfit!"

"Yes, I'm sure you'd just love to have a nice, peaceful life, wouldn't you, Potter?" Pansy began. "I suggest you stop trying to live in your own little pocket of space. Life isn't fair and the sooner you own up to that, the sooner you can see reality for what it is. Not everyone has a choice in the path they get set on."

"I thought you didn't believe in fate." Harry commented. "If you see a lack of options, you've only got one path to follow. And if you don't try and break free from that path, you're following right into fate's plan."

Pansy looked at Harry strangely for a moment before narrowing her eyes. "It must be nice to be able to think like that. Maybe you *will* be there to stop him."

"Whether I want to or not, probably." Harry said, shrugging. "Unlike you, I put others before my own well-being. I'd risk my own life to save anyone, regardless of who it was."

"Even me, Potter?" Pansy asked, smirking.

"Even you." Harry replied. The lack of even a moment's hesitation caught Pansy offguard. And, for the briefest of moments, Harry thought he saw something reflected in the girl's eyes. "Feeling alright, Parkinson? You don't look well."

Pansy shook her head. "You don't know what you're saying, Potter." She said, sounding tired all of a sudden. "You act like you'll always be able to save the day. What happens when you can't? Then you'll have died for no reason."

Harry smiled. "If I die protecting my friends, then that's reason enough. I've looked death in the face more times than I'd care to admit... especially to you. Don't think Voldemort's the only person who's tried to kill me, Parkinson. You'd be surprised how many times I've been close enough to death that I could almost see the other side."

"What are you going on about?" Pansy asked.

"I'm not going further into it with you." Harry stated. "That you know this much is uncomfortable for me."

"Then why tell me?"

Harry shrugged. "I'm not sure. I know it's pointless trying to explain something like this to someone like you. You'd just as soon escape the battle and save your own life than stay behind and die protecting someone you love."

"Watch your bloody mouth, Potter." Pansy hissed out. "Don't act like you know what I'd do if I was cornered."

"It's pointless, anyway." Harry said. "As I doubt you'll ever know what it's like to truly care about someone else. Let alone to the point of loving them. I've found that Slytherins seem to care about themselves first and foremost, after all."

"So being in Slytherin means automatically giving up your own feelings and emotions for some kind of collective?" Pansy asked. "Is that what you really think?"

"I've yet to see proof showing me otherwise." Harry said, raising his eyebrows.

Pansy glared daggers at him and stalked forward.

Harry Potter had been having a very odd, very trying week. He had been in a bad mood for most of it and had spent the rest in a baffled state, trying to work various things out. And all the while, Dementors and the ever-possible threat of Sirius Black loomed over his head. All he wanted was to sit down in his chair in the common room, grab a nice, long book, and just lose himself in his reading.

Harry was glad for one thing, though. He was glad that, in the past, he had kissed Tonks. It might not have been the most elegant or romantic of kisses, and it certainly wasn't a proper kiss, but it had happened. And Harry was thanking Merlin, the four founders of Hogwarts, and every other important historical figure in magic for this. Because if he had to endure the thought of Pansy Parkinson giving him his first kiss, he would've gone willingly to the giant squid to let it eat him.

"Don't think you know everything about me." Pansy murmured darkly after pulling away. "And don't assume every Slytherin supports the Dark Lord or wants him to return. Some of us enjoy our relatively peaceful lives. Like I said... Keep away from me, Potter. And keep your damn friends away from me, too, if you value their lives. I may not do anything to them... but then, I wouldn't be the one to initiate something like that."

Pansy slipped out of the room almost the second she finished speaking, leaving Harry alone and still dazed. It was bad enough that he didn't understand women in general. Harry wasn't entirely sure

what the hell was wrong with Pansy Parkinson, but there was no way in goblin hell that it was anything he wanted to be a part of. Making a face as he slowly faded back into reality, he wiped his mouth on his robe's sleeve.

And, as he finally regained his motor functions enough to walk, he headed out of the classroom. As he did, he shook his head and muttered, "Can't believe that barmy pug kissed me."

The next morning, the Great Hall was abuzz with noise as Harry and his friends entered it. Fred and George were in front of them almost immediately, flailing about and talking at once. Harry had to yell to get them to shut up and talk to him properly. They dragged the three Ravenclaws over to the Gryffindor table. Once there, one of the twins motioned to Ron and said, "Go on! Tell him what happened."

"Why me?" Ron asked.

"Because it happened to you, dimwit." The other twin said. At Ron's silence, he sighed and turned to Harry. "Our dear brother here..."

"Was nearly at the receiving end..." Continued the first.

"Of a knife weilded by Sirius Black!"

"What?" Harry and Tonks cried out.

"Woke up in the middle of the night... and I saw him. Was *RIGHT* over me, he was. If I hadn't been awake enough to roll off to the side and yell, he probably would've gotten me, too." Ron said. "Seemed to scare poor Scabbers half to death, too. He's been hiding under the table our water's on ever since. Couldn't drag him out, either. I tried and he actually *BIT* me!"

"Why would Black attack Ron, though?" Solieyu asked.

"Dunno. He knew your parents though, didn't he?" Fred asked. "Mum was blubbering to dad one night and just kept going on about it. Was your dad in Gryffindor?"

"Yeah, he was." Harry said, nodding. "Dumbledore mentioned it to me."

"Well, there you go." George said. "Probably assumed you were sorted there, too."

"Yeah, but surely he knew I wouldn't look like Ron does." Harry said. "No offense or anything."

Ron shrugged.

"Dunno. But Dumbledore apparently furious. The Dementors didn't seem to detect him, which is downright eerie if you ask me." Fred said. "Those things are naturally attracted to people."

"Maybe all that time in Azkaban made him immune or something? He broke out, so they probably *can't* detect him or something. Dunno how, though." Harry said.

"Yeah, s'weird." George nodded. "If we find out anything, we'll fill you in, yeah? Even we can't be stealthy around those bloody things. If this guy *can* be, we want to know how."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Yeah, just like you two to admire the sneaking ability of a lunatic. Thanks for the head's up, though."

"Jeez... it's not even Halloween and things are starting up." Tonks said as the three went to the Ravenclaw table. "Can't we have one year where nothing bad happens?"

"Doesn't look like it." Solieyu said.

"Haven't even eaten yet and I already have a headache." Harry said, sighing. As he sat down, he glanced over towards the Slytherin table. Usually he did this to make a mental note of how many of Malfoy's goon squad weren't there, as it tended to be a warning for him to watch his back en route to classes. But today, he managed to lock eyes with Pansy for the briefest of moments. She sent a scowl his way, then turned back to listening to whatever Malfoy was going on about.

Sighing, Harry started loading food onto his plate.

Next to him, Tonks watched this odd exchange, then prodded him. "What was that all about, then?"

"I wish I knew, Tonks. I honestly wish I knew."

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Author's Notes: Hey! Sorry this one took awhile - most of the time was spent trying to think of what the hell Tonks' boggart would be! A friend of mine suggested something and I rolled with the idea. I hope you found it amusing. I hope you've all had a happy holiday season, whatever you celebrate. I've gotten more games in the past couple months than my wrists would care to deal with, quite frankly.

Suggestion(s) duly noted. Besides, any excuse to opt out and get Harry away from Hagrid is fine by me. Ugh. If I need anything related to those classes to happen, it can happen through Tonks and Leon. Plus it gave me an idea for using Pansy at some point down the line. In case I haven't made myself vocal about it yet, I can't stand typical, cut-and-paste pairings. I like the more exotic ones - Harry and Tonks, Harry and Luna, Harry and Fleur, Harry and Pansy, etc.

No, I'm not grinning evilly. I've no idea what you mean. Only one and a half of those ideas will ever properly come to pass in this series!

Besides, keeping things in the air drives you guys insane and keeps you coming back. I'm a very evil author, I know.

I do hope fans of Most Haunted caught my glaring nod towards the show. While I thought Derek brought a fine bit of humor and dramatic flare to the program, I also think he's a pretty bad psychic. I MUCH prefer Gordon to him. He doesn't overact, he's willing to step back and look at things from Ciaran's perspective... and I like his accent. I do hope Most Haunted gets the DVDs released stateside. Travel Channel is stupid and airs the episodes out of order. My only fix is through a torrent website.

I hope everyone enjoyed the Harry and Pansy bits. Don't worry, this fic's clearly still Honks. As if Harry wiping Pansy's kiss off wasn't

obvious enough. I have my reasons for having her kiss him out of the blue. If you've been paying attention, you should also know why. No, I'm not telling. Go re-read things and piece it together on your own. Until next time, folks!

Chapter 8 – Vampire Heart

"So it's his rat?"

"Yeah. Takes the stupid thing everywhere. Dunno why. We've had him for ages, though. I think he's trying to beat Errol's record."

"Errol?"

"Ancient owl of ours."

"Ahh."

Harry was sitting out near the lake with Fred and George, watching as they changed the giant squid's colors. Tonks and Solieyu had Divination homework, so Harry was free to wander the castle. He had run into the twins, both of who looked rather annoyed. When asked to explain, they had wheeled him towards the lake and began an explanation involving Ron's rat, Hermione's cat, and all other manner of things that were keeping them from properly inventing things.

"Anyway, it's like this..." Fred began.

"Hermione's cat, ugly thing that it is, took a distinct dislike to Scabbers over the summer." George continued.

"She actually came over to hang out with Ginny, see..."

"And she and Ron kept getting into these massive rows because her cat wouldn't leave Scabbers be."

"And it *still* hasn't stopped."

"Scabbers finally came out from under the water table, apparently..."

"And Crookshanks - that's Hermione's cat - chased him back under it."

"And that's why you two came downstairs in such a huff?" Harry asked.

"Yup. Ron and Hermione were going back and forth in the common room, distracting everyone else." George said, rolling his eyes. "Like an old married couple, those two."

"Who would've guessed?" Fred added, tilting his head. "Is it just me, or did he put her in a bad way awhile back? I think she *knows* she's much smarter than Ron..."

"Not to mention better at magic." George chimed in.

"Right, so she isn't afraid of him anymore. Something like that, anyway." Fred finished.

"Well, then. Ron and I finally agree on something, then." Harry said. When he saw the twins giving him an odd look, he explained, "Women are impossible."

At this, the Weasleys perked up, grinning at Harry.

"Aww, is ickle Harrykins havin' love problems wiff his Tonksie?" Fred asked, batting his eyelashes.

Choking, Harry flailed around before glaring at the redhead. "No! No, I *wish* it was. Look, you two won't repeat anything I say here, right?"

"You have our word!" Replied the two.

"Pansy Parkinson pulled me into a classroom, yelled at me for awhile, kissed me, and then left." Harry said, deciding being right to the point was the best course of action to take.

The reaction would have made Harry laugh, if he hadn't been too miserable trying to work out what it all had meant. He had never seen the Weasley twins at a loss for words. They kept looking at each other, then down at him, then back to each other. After a good, solid minute of this, Fred spoke up, "Pansy Parkinson. The girl everyone calls pug-faced? The Slytherin? You let yourself get *kissed* by her?"

"Well I didn't really have a choice! We were arguing and then, out of bloody nowhere, she hauls off and kisses me! And then she left before I could recover from the shock!"Harry said, shaking his head

slowly. "I honestly have no idea what's going on, but the less of it I have to deal with, the better off I'll be."

"Tough luck, lad." George said, patting Harry on the back. "I think I'd try spelling my lips off if a Slytherin girl planted one on them."

"Yes, well, I plan to be using them in the future. Hopefully. I guess." Harry said, trailing off feebly. "Just... not with *her*. Ugh."

"So... what do you plan to do about it all?" Fred asked.

"Well, I plan to resume ignoring Parkinson, providing she stops trying to burn me to death in Ancient Runes." Harry said, making a face. "As for Tonks, I'll just have to work things along slowly, that's all."

"And what of the other couple dozen girls out to do what Puggy Parkinson pulled?" Asked George, making kissy faces.

Slugging the redhead on the arm, Harry scowled. "Ignore them, as well. Out of sight, out of mind. I don't suppose you could do something about my so-called fan club, could you?"

"We've not yet had reason to be able to trigger a reaction on such a large scale." Fred said. "Our pranks have so far remained secluded to a small number of people."

"Care to work out something bigger, then?" Harry asked.

The twins exchanged a look before shrugging. "We wouldn't mind. What kind of widespread chaos were you thinking of?"

"Oh, I dunno. Creativity is your department. I just throw ideas to it every so often." Harry said. "I want it to be spectacular, though. Something that could affect the whole of Slytherin, plus Snape, without actually causing any real damage. That way you could only get points or detention. Nothing expulsion-worthy."

"But getting around being expelled is what we do best. If we're going to catch Snape in our trap, we'll have to slow him - and all of them - down."

"Shame you guys can't turn the dungeon floors into quicksand or something." Harry commented. After a moment of silence, he looked up at Fred and George. "...You can't, can you?"

"Dunno." Fred said, eyes wider than normal.

"But I think we have something to do over the weekend now." George added, grinning.

"Oi oi." Harry said, shaking his head again.

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Harry's head was buzzing again. Not from a standard-issue headache or, thankfully, more encounters with Pansy Parkinson. No, this was more because of the increased Dementor activity around the school. The ravenous soul-suckers had been stationed much closer to the school since Black's break-in, much to the annoyance of the students. Dumbledore himself seemed almost irritated, though it was carefully masked.

His headache also had to do with the upcoming Hogsmeade trip. The trip that Harry wasn't going to be going on. While Andromeda had said she would speak to Dumbledore, the headmaster apparently hadn't gotten the blasted permission form out of Harry's bedroom at Number Four after all. So he was stuck in the castle while everyone else got to go and have fun.

"We'll bring you back a buncha stuff, alright? Little bit o' everything!" Tonks said, frowning slightly. She had tried to keep from going, as well, but Harry had pushed her towards Solieyu, telling them to have fun.

"I'll catch up on reading for my new classes." Harry said. "I'll probably head for the Nest to ensure some quiet. Providing Tonks doesn't get too wired on sweets, catch up to me there when you get back."

Solieyu nodded and Tonks stuck her tongue out at him as they turned to join the large group in the Entrance Hall. Harry just chuckled and, trying not to think of his painfully bad luck, turned to head back to

Ravenclaw Tower for some reading material. After doing so, he slipped off to his hidden tower to relax.

It was a brisk fall day, but the winds were kept to a minimum where Harry had chosen to sit. Or, at least, low enough that they didn't interfere with his reading. By the time his friends slipped through the trapdoor, he had browsed through all of his Ancient Runes book and was plodding through the Arithmancy one at a slower pace, mostly due to his eyes tiring out.

"Have fun?" He asked.

"Loads!" Tonks said, chucking a bag full of stuff to Harry.

"We come bringing sugar." Solieu stated, sitting down with a slight wince.

"Good. I gotta tell you two... these new classes of mine? Interesting in practice, but the theory behind them is so needlessly complicated that it *hurts*. There's so much that could be taken out while still delivering the point." Harry said, setting his Arithmancy book down to rummage through his bag of treats.

"So what'd you two get?" Harry asked, eyeballing a sugar quill.

"Tonks managed to haggle a small candy shop of things." Solieu replied, raising an eyebrow as he looked at the girl. "It was... most impressive, actually. Frightening, but impressive."

"Girl's gotta keep her energy levels high somehow!" Tonks declared, grinning.

"And you, Leon?"

Tonks made a face. "I caught him stowing away a surprisingly large amount of lollipops. I managed to snake one away from him. You know what they were?"

"Blood Pops?" Harry asked, not bothering to look up.

"Yeah! ...Hey, wait, how'd you guess?" Tonks asked.

Harry did look up then. "I think it's close enough to spill the beans, Leon. Besides, Tonks is officially going to drive us both crazy if you don't."

Sighing, Solieyu rubbed at the bridge of his nose for a moment. "You know, I didn't *want* to get them. But the other part of me was drawn to them like a moth to a flame. I *hate* the taste of blood."

"So why'd you get 'em?" Tonks asked.

"Because," Solieyu said, turning to look at her. "I'm a vampire."

Tonks blinked. She pursed her lips and seemed to slip off into her own little world for a minute. Then her eyes got wide and she let out a low 'ohhhh.'

"I've got a lot of questions for you, you know." Harry said, sucking at the tip of a sugar quill. "Like what, exactly, was in that potion we had to give you over the summer."

"Blood substitute." Solieyu replied, shrugging. "As I've said... I hate the taste of blood. To the point where I refused to drink it."

"I think we need some setup for this." Tonks said. "Or, at least, I think I do."

"I've been thinking about what I was going to tell you. If I get to rambling, feel free to stop me." Solieyu said. Then, leaning his head back and shutting his eyes, he started speaking again. "As you've seen, I live with my mother. I'm not sure I ever mentioned it before or not, but my father left us years ago."

"Why?" Asked Tonks.

"Because of me. Or rather, because of what happened *to* me." Solieyu replied. "It happened when I was eight. We lived elsewhere then, near a large forest. I always used to run off and play in it. I didn't really know anyone in the area, so I'd find ways to keep myself busy. A lot of animals in the forest seemed to like me, too, so I'd often chase the rabbits around or...somesuch. Little kid stuff."

"But father argued constantly with mother and I, telling us that dark things lived in the woods and that if I wasn't careful, I would be attacked. He also said that he wouldn't stay in the same house with a son stupid enough to not heed his warnings. But, being so little, I didn't listen to him. You know how parents can be - keeping their children safe even if they have to lie to him. Anyway... one night, just after sundown, I snuck outside to play. I had found a nice little clearing a good ways in that I hid stupid things I had found in. Unimportant stuff like bottle caps and old bottles of various sorts."

Solieyu opened his eyes to stare at the floor, but he seemed to be somewhere else. "When I got there that night, there was a cloaked figure lying in the center of the clearing. She was crying... very hard, in fact. I guess that was what compelled me to see if she was okay. If I hadn't... I might still be normal today. When I got close, she attacked. I screamed and could feel something sink into my neck. But, at the time, I thought she had a knife or something and was going to kill me.

"She left, laughing this... godawful laugh... and I was left there, in the middle of a dark forest, injured. I tried to stand to get out of there, but I couldn't. I was so dizzy that I could barely open my eyes. My arms were shaking and I distinctly remember being violently ill.

"Mother found me the next afternoon, pale and barely clinging to life. She brought me home and called for a healer. Father was outraged. I'm kind of glad I don't remember a lot of what happened after that. I passed out not long after being carried home. The next thing I remember is waking up at St. Mungo's, alone in a room. My parents were arguing with a healer just outside the door. They were being quiet, but somehow, I could hear them as clearly as if they were in the room with me..."

The long-haired boy blew out a long sigh and caught his breath, then let his eyes slip shut to continue. "Father was yelling at the healer, asking what the purpose of the hospital was if they couldn't fix a problem like mine. Mother was crying... she never said much of anything, really. The healer seemed almost as angry as father was, telling him that if he didn't lower his voice, he would have to be escorted from the premises. I blacked out shortly after that..."

"As it turns out, the women I had been bitted by was named Alexis Palinsky, a vampire who got her kicks from going around and converting children and the elderly into one of her kind. She was wanted by both British and Russian Ministries for her crimes. As far as I know, she hasn't been caught - or killed - yet."

"So she's still out there *doing* stuff like that?" Tonks asked, shivering a little.

Solieyu nodded. "I'm sure I would have heard one way or another if she had been captured or taken down somehow."

"So can you like... y'know, turn into a bat?" Tonks asked, grinning crookedly.

"No. But he *can* turn into a wolf. Can't you?" Harry asked.

"A wolf, yes. I've...tried changing into a bat, but it's still beyond my current level of power. I should be able to at some point, but every time I've tried, I've just depleted what little strength I have."

"Why the weakness, anyway?" Tonks asked. "I mean, aren't vampires more powerful than regular humans?"

"Normally. But it ties in to my hatred of blood. See, after father left, it was just mother and I, trying to work out how to deal with my curse. It's not easy for me to stomach regular food, see..."

"Which is why I never see you eat much." Harry commented.

Solieyu nodded. "Exactly. Mother used to go into the forest and... kill some of the animals there. It was awful. The same creatures I had played with and told all my silly little secrets to were being offered up to me for meals. I tried to stop at one point, but... things didn't go well at all..."

Harry stared at his friend for a moment before asking, "Does this have anything to do with the potion you take? You...seemed a bit different that day, before Tonks brought it to you."

Wincing, Solieyu nodded again. "That potion is a substitute. It gives me the same general benefits that blood would... Except for the strength. Unless I consume real blood, I'll always be as tired and weak as you usually see me. I've also tried to get away from *that*, because it still tastes like real blood... but if I don't, the Craving starts to take hold. That's what you saw that day. The beginnings of me losing control."

"The Craving?" Asked Tonks.

"If a vampire doesn't feed in a certain amount of time, their bloodlust overpowers everything else. They seek out the nearest source of blood and drain it to satiate the feeling. Once they're full again, they revert back to being as normal as anyone else, enhanced abilities aside. The potion, being a substitute, doesn't last as long as a proper feeding would. I have to take it once every so often or the Craving takes hold. Fortunately, back in your neighborhood, I was able to keep the urge under control long enough for Tonks to deliver the potion. It works blissfully fast, but..."

"It sucks the remaining strength out of you?" Harry questioned.

"Mm." Solieyu nodded. "If it hits after the Craving kicks in, it lays me up for days."

"Ouch. So... if the potion tastes just like the real thing, why not just drink the real thing and get your strength back?" Tonks asked.

"Moral objections. I always did hate meat." Solieyu said.

"A vegetarian vampire?" Harry snorted.

Solieyu offered a small smile. "Something like that. Anyway... the first time the Craving hit me, mother was barely able to fend me off. Luckily for both of us, she's a very skilled witch when the need arises. She had to call the Ministry to try and get some Aurors out there. They managed to subdue me, but they also informed mother of my blood-related issues.

"After that, we had to go to the Ministry and fill out a ton of forms. That's where we found out about the potion, actually. And about

Palinsky. Unfortunately, the potion isn't cheap, so we've been pretty poor off for awhile. When my letter to Hogwarts came, I thought I would have to turn the offer down because of my condition. But Dumbledore came over for dinner one night and informed us that not only would he be willing to let me enrolle, he'd help pay for the potion while I was here."

"That was awfully nice of him." Tonks commented.

"Indeed." Solieyu said. "When father left, he took his income with him, so it was a true blessing. Since my conversion, I've been faster than ever, my senses have been enhanced...and I can smell blood very distinctly. That's another reason I don't eat much. Do you have any idea how strong the scent is in the Great Hall? All that blood and it takes a lot of concentration to keep the Craving from just triggering out of a want to slake my thirst."

"If it ever does hit, go for the Slytherins first, would you?" Tonks asked.

"I dunno. They probably all have poison in their veins." Harry said, looking thoughtful. Or, at least, as thoughtful as a person could look with half a feather in their mouth. "...I guess this explains how you could tell where that ruddy troll was in our first year, eh?"

"Quite. I could smell its blood *and* its natural odor. *That* wasn't very pleasant with my enhanced senses, either." Solieyu said, making a face. "On that note, I'm not looking forward to getting *all* of my powers."

"Why's that?" Harry asked.

"Have you ever heard of veelas?" Solieyu asked.

Harry shook his head.

"Very beautiful women that have a natural attraction power. Men follow after them, tend to lose a proper grip on how they think, that sort of thing. From what I've read, vampires have the same sort of power, only in reverse." Solieyu explained, looking disgusted.

"Good. Take some of the ones following *me* around all the time." Harry said.

"I wish I could joke about it. I can barely keep my wolf transformation held. I think my powers are triggered easier when there's a *need* for them to be. Like last year, in the forest... I'd just like to state, again, that acromantulas taste absolutely vile." Solieyu said.

"Hey, wait..." Harry said, thinking back a bit. "Did you get Mrs. Norris to block my attempts at following you back in first year?"

Solieyu smiled. "I might have. Animals *do* seem to like me, after all."

"Damn! I knew it seemed a bit fishy for her to just randomly appear while I was trailing you. ...hold on, does that mean you knew I was after you?" Harry asked.

"The whole time."

"Dammit, you were just toying with me, then?" Scowled Harry.

"More or less. But it was interesting to see you try so often." Solieyu said.

"Was that how you knew I was being attacked by Ron?" Tonks asked, her voice a bit softer.

"Harry heard something first. I think I was recovering from almost having an episode with the Craving. But when we got closer, I was able to pick up on it properly."

"You looked good and pissed off that day." Harry said. "I think that was the first time I had ever heard anyone *growl* like you did."

"Yes, well, he picked a bad time to cause trouble with my friends, that's all." Solieyu said. "I'm just glad the potion was working correctly."

"He practically carried me to Madam Pomfrey's office, you know." Tonks said, tilting her head. "I didn't really think much of it at the time. Too out of it."

"Any explanation as to why you can walk around in the daylight without exploding or turning to powder? Whichever one's true. Couldn't find a proper source on that here, oddly enough." Harry said, cocking an eyebrow.

Solieyu chuckled. "It's a mostly untrue myth, that. Vampires are perfectly capable of handling daylight. It's the sun we have issues with. And what I mean by that is - you know how most people get sunburn after lingering outside?"

"Yeah..." Harry replied.

"It's much, much worse for us. Found that out the hard way. Burn cream is not fun to apply to partially-charred flesh." Solieyu said, grinning crookedly. "It helps if there are clouds out to keep the sun from hitting me directly... but I do alright for a good hour or two before my skin starts to itch. That's the first indication that it's time to find some shade. If I don't listen to that, my skin starts to... how should I put this so it makes the most sense? - Um... it sizzles. Kind of. Of course, you'd probably need enhanced hearing to pick the sound up, as it's very faint. After that, I have about five minutes to get out of direct sunlight before it literally begins to burn and bubble."

"I'm guessing that's why you live near the woods." Harry guessed.

"Right in one. I'm not sure if you noticed or not, but all of the trees at my house were spaced close enough together so that only the smallest amount of sunlight gets through." Solieyu explained.

"What about during the winter months, when the trees lose their leaves?" Tonks asked.

"Ahh, but they don't. We've made sure to spell the trees to stay in bloom. It's not very nice to the trees, as they're basically forced into a neverending stunner-type spell... but it's definitely easier on me. And before you ask - no, we don't get attention because of the trees. The area's warded to keep curious Muggles away, after all. If they get too close, it activates and they just lose interest." Solieyu said. "Now then, is there anything else I should clear up?"

"Mm, not that I can think of. Yet. Though I'd suggest, when it hits, to get your creepy Aura of Smooth power under control as quickly as possible." Harry said, smirking.

"*Aura of Smooth*' power?" Solieyu repeated.

"The natural attraction one." Harry said.

"...What an interesting name you've decided to give it." Solieyu stated, blandly.

"Yes, well, just see to it that it's in check, eh?"

Solieyu glanced aside, then back to Harry, a smirk on his own face. "Afraid that I might unintentionally sweep Tonks away from you, hm?"

"I never said that." Harry muttered, suddenly more interested in his sugar quill than the topic.

"Good as." Solieyu replied, raising an eyebrow. "Tonks, what do you think? Is Harry being protective of you because he's afraid of losing you?"

Tonks blushed slightly and took up the same half-winded attempt at denying the subject that Harry had. "Shut up, Leon." She scowled, swatting him on the arm. "And stop teasing us."

"Yeah, since when did *you* have a sense of humor?" Harry asked, a sour look on his face still.

"I've always had a sense of humor." Solieyu said. "It's just very, very dry."

"Oh, I could make a cutting retort out of that." Tonks mumbled, glaring at the long-haired boy out of the corner of her eyes.

"I'm sure you could." Solieyu said. "In all seriousness, though... thank you both for hearing me out. It... feels nice to be able to tell someone. Dumbledore's condition for my coming here basically included a 'keep your secret hidden' clause. I don't think he'll be too upset if he finds out, though."

Harry nodded. "Dumbledore's not quite right in the head, but he's a nice guy deep down. Or... what have you. He seems to enjoy things not going according to plan. I think it keeps him from being bored."

"Sounds about right." Solieyu said.

"Hey, Leon. Mind if I ask you one more question?" Harry asked.

Solieyu nodded, so Harry continued, "Now that you've explained, care to tell us what's *really* bothering you about Professor Lupin?"

Solieyu looked down, face slightly twisted. "...That, I'm not sure of. I can tell he isn't human. The basic scent is completely off. But I haven't the foggiest idea of what he could be. I've never smelled something like that before in my life, so I have nothing to go off of. And it isn't just his basic scent. His blood smells strange, too."

"How many smells can a person give off?" Tonks asked.

"I've learned to go by a couple. Gives me something to do when I'm bored." Solieyu said. "Plus it's always a good idea to know things about a person that they don't want you to. You know, in case Lupin turns out to be completely loony."

"I dunno. He seems really laid back, Leon." Harry said. "He hasn't shown any of the signs Quirrell and Lockhart did."

"The point stands, Harry. He isn't fully human. I know for sure that he isn't a vampire, as I'd recognize the scent on both levels. I've been around other vampires before, mostly during visits to the Ministry, and I've gotten acquainted enough with the odor to pick it up instantly." Solieyu said.

"Shame you can't line up one of each not-quite-human wizards types and give 'em a good whiff, eh?" Tonks piped in, grinning.

"I try not to 'whiff' anyone if I can help it." Replied Solieyu, drolly. Looking back to Harry, he continued, "Tell you what... I'll speak with Professor Dumbledore about it. I'm sure he knows. If he allowed me to come here, chances are he's let other special cases in, as well. I'm pretty sure Professor Lupin classifies."

"It's nice to have someone else doing all the detective work." Harry commented. "Last year, my brain nearly caved in."

"I'm going to go ahead and tell the headmaster that I've told the two of you, as well. You *did* technically figure it out." Solieyu said. "He may want to speak with each of you alone, together, or just sit all three of us down for a chat, so be expecting it."

Harry and Tonks nodded.

"Right. Let's get out of this tower then, shall we? I need to stretch my legs and, quite frankly, I wouldn't mind a softer place to sit." Solieyu said, getting to his feet.

"Agreed." Harry said, grabbing his bag of treats and tucking the sugar quill back into it. "We *really* need to get around to transfiguring some cushions to sit on, at least. Maybe spelling them to stay put... and dry... so that the elements can't affect them. We need some kind of sticking spell... one we can remove if we want to rearrange the seating or something."

"Leave the decorating to me." Tonks said, eyes flashing.

"Oh lord. Imagine the color scheme." Harry said. He was rewarded with a swift ear flick, which made him wince and nearly drop his bag. "Oww!"

"Hold your tongue, O Boy Who Lived." Tonks said, sticking out *her* tongue. "I'll have you know that I help mum out all the time when it comes to rearranging furniture or choosing new stuff for the house. I'm surprised the bug hasn't hit *you*, Harry. The books I've seen on Metamorphmagi have all mentioned in passing that we seem to have this natural drive in regard to colors and layouts. S'probably why you picked that one chair to claim as yours."

"No, I claimed it because it was comfortable and didn't cause my back to pop in five different spots if I sat and lost myself in a book for a few hours." Harry replied. "I think the contents of your books are sketchy at best and require a better source of information!" He added, making his voice a few bits snootier. "Would you happen to have some form of pamphlet on you, m'lady?"

"I'll pamphlet you!" Tonks cried, aiming a swat at Harry's arm. Harry hopped out of striking range and laughed.

"You'll pamphlet me? What does that even mean? Is it supposed to be some sort of threat?" Harry asked.

"You wait until I get my hands on you, Potter!" Tonks cried, leaping for Harry.

And so it went, as most of their non-arguments did. Tonks would end up winning after pinning Harry down and reminding him of how abysmally ticklish he was. Chuckling quietly to himself, Solieyu opened the trap door and slipped out unnoticed, thankful to have made such good friends... insane as they might be. They had taken his explanation just as Harry claimed they would. They hadn't seemed surprised, scared, or otherwise. It was nice to have people other than his mother and Dumbledore accept him for what he was.

"And on that note..." Solieyu murmured as he sniffed the air at the bottom of the Nest's staircase, checking for nearby students before slipping through the invisible wall. "I've got to find the headmaster. My long day isn't over just yet."

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Author's Notes: Hey, lookit, a quick update! I've diverged from the chapter guide already. Eheh... he... ugh. I've gotta do better at that. But mentioning Black's slip-in wasn't as big a deal as if Harry had been Sorted into Gryffindor. Black had entered, made an incorrect guess, and had fled. The Dementors are now swarming closer together and closer to Hogwarts as a result. But Sirius still doesn't know which house Harry IS in, so it isn't bothering him as much as it might otherwise.

And so here we find out the secret that I've not kept hidden well at all! Yes, I'm taking leeway with proper vampire lore by making him resistant vs sunlight - it'd be kinda hard to deal with, otherwise. Oh sure, I could argue that it might just be a case of Palinsky being a poor excuse for a vampire and that more pure, less inbred vampires would give over 'proper' vampire weaknesses. But I'm not gonna

because this makes things easier. The powers are almost a non-issue, anyway, so no one should make too big a deal out of it.

I THINK I covered all major instances of Leon's powers activating. I scrolled back through the last two books briefly. If I missed anything, chalk it up to Harry and Tonks not recalling it, either.

If anyone still hasn't put the pieces together, Solieu's name is comprised of the names of various characters from the Akumajou Dracula (Castlevania) series of games. Specifically, Solieu Belmont from the second Gameboy CV game (Belmont's Revenge) and Reinhardt Schneider from the N64 CV game. Dietrich was pulled out of the anime Trinity Blood. Mostly because I thought it would fit nicely as Leon's middle name. ...On that note, even his nickname is a proper character from CV. Leon Belmont, from Lament of Innocence. Leon's mum is named Maria, who was in Symphony of the Night. Her maiden name is Schneider, which again - the N64 game. Leon's father is named Trevor, who was in Castlevania III for the NES. His last name is the one Leon chose to keep (Reinhardt).

So if you're a Castlevania fan and DIDN'T pick up on the fact that every member of his family had a CV-related name, shame on you.

And now that I've thoroughly confused everyone who isn't a gamer, it's off to enjoy the end of the year, as I finished this at around midnight on December 30th. See you next chapter and next year!

Post-edit update: It's not 36 minutes past. I figured I'd get the editing out of the way tonight. Happy New Year's, you lot!

Chapter 9 – Memorization

Draco Malfoy was in a bad mood.

Of course, Draco Malfoy was almost always in a bad mood. But as of late, the blonde had been irritated seemingly all of the time. The first years had already learned to stay away from him. Crabbe and Goyle had even been dismissed rather viciously after they failed to take the not-so-subtle hints that Malfoy was dropping about wanting some space.

Draco sat in the Slytherin common room, legs crossed and arms stretched out along the back of the couch, staring intently into the fire that was roaring. A plan was slowly forming in his mind. A plan that included humiliating Harry Potter in front of the whole school. The rumor mill at Hogwarts was startlingly fast, so it wasn't a secret that Potter was frightened to death by Dementors.

In addition, Draco had overheard that the upcoming Gryffindor versus Ravenclaw Quidditch match would take place during a particularly nasty thunderstorm. Dementors were drawn to large groups of people and, despite the headmaster's wishes that they remain a certain distance from any buildings on the grounds unless Black was spotted, Draco felt they would be pulled towards the pitch. Most of the school in attendance with energetic students cheering on their friends? It was a shame Draco didn't have control over the Dementors.

In addition, other rumors had been circulating. Very interesting ones, to say the least. At first, he hadn't paid much attention to them. Draco rarely listened to the groups of chattering harpies that ditched their schoolwork to gossip. But, as he had overheard an acquaintance's name being mentioned, he had listened in discreetly. What he had found out was rather confusing, though it was quite intriguing, as well.

He hadn't decided on a path to take for that, though. Instead, he watched the flames lick at the stones around them, a frenzy of ideas soaring through his mind. He would make sure Potter was humiliated. If the Dementors just happened to be around when it happened, well...

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"Dammit, could the weather get any bloody worse?" Harry cried, his voice lost in the sound of a crack of thunder.

He was flying high above the Quidditch pitch, as the snitch had decided to see what clouds were made of. Only Harry had lost sight of it after a sudden flash of lightning temporarily blinded him. Below him, Gryffindor's Seeker was alternating between circling the pitch and glancing up at Harry.

Harry wasn't very happy with being so high above the ground in the storm. Especially since every time lightning filled the sky, the sight of an army of Dementors filled his vision. And maybe it was just a trick of the light or his imagination playing with him, but they seemed to be getting closer each time the sky was illuminated. Figuring that the snitch would just have to jolly well come down to him, Harry started descending again back to a more rational height.

For whatever reason, he happened to glance off towards the Forbidden Forest. He wasn't sure what he saw moving through the trees. He wasn't sure even when it stopped and seemed to face his way. All Harry could make out was that it was large and dark in color. Harry had been forcing himself to keep track of all dark, moving objects just in case the Dementors decided to swarm the pitch or something.

And then, just as soon as it had appeared, whatever it was had gone. Harry resumed his descent and, slowly, Lee Jordan's announcing filled his ears again. The Ravenclaw team was having an off year, to be sure. They had lost their Keeper and one of their Chasers that year, since Ray Gainsborough and Carol Allenby had graduated last year, and the replacements still weren't playing up to Lynch's standards. The score was 140-100 in favor of Gryffindor. Harry was going to have to be careful when going after the snitch. If the Gryffindors won on quaffle power alone, the whole Ravenclaw team would be too embarrassed to show themselves. Making matters worse was Lynch's almost manic drive to make his team be perfect. Harry could at least understand why, though. It was his (and Beater Ellie Shott's) last year at Hogwarts. Harry didn't blame him for wanting to win.

Harry was sweeping low, as he thought he saw a glimmer of gold near the ground, when it happened. Shortly after flying past the base of Ravenclaw's goal posts, a black, cloaked shape swept out onto the pitch. A wave of cold washed over Harry, causing him to yank his broom back and go into a jarring climb. Voices erupted in his head and, so sudden was the Dementor's effects on him, Harry barely managed to level himself out again. The sounds of Lee Jordan and everyone else seemed to be far away and echoing, as if they were at the far end of a very long tunnel. Harry's grip on his broom weakened, despite his best attempts to stay airborn.

His mother's screams pounded in his head as more and more Dementors entered. With each new arrival, the cries of his parents grew louder and louder. Harry flattened out on his broom and clasped his hands over his ears, but it was no use. There was no way to silence the effect the Dementors were having on him. The grip his legs had on the Nimbus grew weaker and, eventually, Harry slipped off one side. Darkness began to approach and, as one more bolt of lightning filled the sky with light, Harry almost thought he could see Tonks' panic-stricken face.

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"Ugh..."

"Told you he was waking up."

"Honestly! I know how you could and all, but that was *creepy*, Leon."

"Wouldjoo two shu'p?" Harry slurred, his eyes cracking slightly. Why did the bloody hospital always have to be so *bright*? Didn't they ever think of a patient's eyes after they were out for a long time? "How long've I been out?" He asked after clearing his throat a few times.

"Oh, just a few hours." Tonks said, grinning.

"Dumbledore did a handy bit of wandless magic to catch you." Solieyu explained. "You just sort of stopped a bit above the ground. He didn't let you fall into the swarm of Dementors."

"Awful nice of him." Harry mumbled. "Th'hell were they stormin' the pitch for, anyway?"

"Dunno. Dumbledore looked as mad as we've ever seen him, though. He practically chased all the Dementors away on his own." Tonks said.

"Still got a headache." Harry groused.

"That would probably be an after-effect of the Dementors." Solieyu said. "Madam Pomfrey said there was nothing wrong with you physically."

"I've gotta talk to Professor Lupin about this... I've gotta do something about this stupid weakness. If Dumbledore won't let him teach me, I'll learn it on my own."

"That's a right bit of complicated magic, I hear." Said Solieyu. "But, perhaps, the headmaster might have changed any thoughts on the issue after that game."

"Yeah, well, let's hope so." Muttered Harry. "I'm not taking a dive like that again."

"Did I not tell you to inform me if he woke up?" Came the voice of Madam Pomfrey, who had just re-entered the room. "Honestly, the day one of you students listens to what I have to say is the day I retire."

Harry chuckled. "We got to talking, that's all. Sorry."

"Yes, well... Let's just be glad you weren't hurt this time, hmm?" Said the nurse, giving Harry a pointed look. "You may leave as soon as you're feeling strong enough to walk. I'm no expert on the effects of Dementors, but I hear they can be quite taxing on your strength."

"Mm." Harry replied. "I feel completely drained. Wouldn't surprise me if I fell back asleep if I just laid here, not saying anything."

"As well you should. Your Defense professor saw fit to bring up a bar of chocolate for you, by the way. Nice to have a man in that position who knows what he's *doing*." Said Pomfrey.

"I second that." Harry agreed, glancing to the side and smiling slightly. He would have to thank Lupin for that later.

Madam Pomfrey did a few more tests on Harry just to ensure there weren't any ill side effects to the Dementors' attack. When she was satisfied that bedrest and chocolate would be the quickest path to recovery, she left the three Ravenclaws to go inform Professor Flitwick that his star Seeker had awakened.

"By the way, wanna hear what happened to Malfoy?" Tonks asked, her eyes lit up.

"What? Buckbeak have him for elevensies?" Harry muttered.

"Nope, but it's almost as good. They found him, Crabbe, and Goyle curled up between the pitch and the school. Apparently, those three had decided to try coming down to the field to try scaring you. They were dressed up like a Dementor, see. Only they didn't get there before the real Dementors started coming in. Seems like they got in the way." Tonks explained.

"Malfoy was supposedly whimpering about having his pet turtle taken away." Solieyu added, eyebrows raised.

Harry snorted. "Malfoy had a *turtle*?"

"Apparently." Solieyu said, smirking slightly. "Though he swore up and down that it was a lie."

"Oi oi..." Harry said, shaking his head. "Well, the little ponce got what was coming to him."

"You look like hell, mate." Tonks commented randomly.

"Yeah, I love you too." Harry scowled.

"No, I mean it." Tonks said. "You look a right state. Now eat your candy and go to sleep so you can escape this awful place."

"Whatever you say, mum." Harry said, rolling his eyes. His arm felt like it was asleep. It flopped awkwardly as he tried to reach for the chocolate. After a few tries, and telling the others that he could get the sweets on his own, Harry finally got the chocolate bar into his hand. He had a much easier time unwrapping and eating it. The effects were almost like a sedative. Not halfway through the bar, he had to put it down. He was only vaguely aware of Tonks moving the half-eaten chocolate and his glasses back over to the table. He thought one of them said something to him, but by that time, his eyes had slipped shut and, under the chocolate's restorative powers, he had drifted back off to sleep.

When he next woke up, it was dark and his friends were gone. He felt much stronger than he had earlier, though his long nap had left him feeling awake and bored. He wondered if he could make it all the way back to Ravenclaw Tower without running into Filch or his infernal cat. The sound of the main doors opening and closing made Harry sit up and grab for his glasses. He heard hushed back-and-forth conversation getting closer and closer. He relaxed slightly when a pair of redheads poked their heads through the curtain keeping his bed hidden.

"Morning, Harry!" Whispered Fred Weasley, grinning broadly.

"Shame that you're awake. We had a few ideas of doing the honor of waking you up ourselves." George said, a mock tone of lament in his voice.

"What brings you two by at this hour?" Harry asked.

"We were out grabbin' a midnight snack." Fred declared, tossing an apple Harry's way.

"A midnight snack?" Harry repeated, catching the apple and looking at it warily.

"Don't worry - we refuse to prank you." George said, sitting down at the end of the bed. "We nicked it - amongst other things - from the kitchens."

"...Kitchens?" Harry asked, blankly.

"C'mon, you had to've known about the kitchens!" Fred said. "Just off in a corridor past the Main Staircase, y'know. There's a big painting of a bowl of fruit. Gotta tickle the pear to get in."

"...How the hell did you two get all the way from Gryffindor Tower down there and then back up here without anyone catching you?" Harry asked.

The twins exchanged a meaningful look. "Well," Fred began, "About that. We have been in the possession of a very special item..."

"One that's made our lives here much more enjoyable!" George continued.

"Lets us sneak past staff and student security!"

"Lets us pinpoint where anyone is in the castle!"

"Lets us pretty much get away with whatsoever we want."

"... I **DARE** you to make less sense." Harry said after a moment of staring.

The twins smiled at one another. "Well," Fred began, pulling out what appeared to be a sheet of parchment from his robes, "It all has to do with *this!*"

"...I'm not following." Harry replied, staring at the parchment blankly.

"Right, look..." George began, pulling his wand. He touched it to the parchment and murmured, "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

And with those words, lines began appearing on the parchment, drawing themselves out all across its surface. As Harry watched, the

hospital was drawn out for him. And, roughly where he and the twins were, a trio of little figures stood, one for each of them. Each was labelled accordingly.

"Whoa..." Harry said, blinking. "So... it's a map, then?"

"Yup." Fred said. "The Marauder's Map."

"Marauder's Map?"

"Look at the top." George instructed. Harry did so and was greeted - literally - by four names presenting themselves to him. A Moony, a Wormtail, a Padfoot, and a Prongs were the only titles given and, Harry had to assume, were code names for the people who made the map. They must not have wanted to be caught or something to have not used their real names.

"So who're those four, then?" Harry asked.

Fred let out a wistful sigh. "No idea, mate. We would be thanking them daily for their effort in helping us out if we did know, though. We nicked this thing from Filch's office a few years back."

"But, as it seems you have a tendency to run into trouble more than we do..." George continued.

"We have decided to pass on this wonderful artifact to you." Fred finished, holding the Marauder's Map out. "You've already heard the way to activate it. To deactivate it, touch it with your wand again and say 'mischief managed,' got it?"

"Got it... But, I mean... are you two sure about this? This seems like it could be *really* useful." Harry said.

"More useful than you'd think." Fred said, grinning. "Weren't you wanting to go to Hogsmeade?"

"Yes... but I forgot the blasted permission form." Harry scowled.

"Not a problem." George said. And, pointing to a passageway, he said, "Look here... There are a number of secret passages leading

out of Hogwarts. Seven in total. We figure Filch only knows about four or so. Trouble is... this one and this one are blocked off. Have been since we've had the Map."

"Your best bet would be the one that comes up in Honeydukes' cellar. It's right here, under the hump of this old hag of a statue on a third floor corridor. S'between the staircase leading from the Entrance Hall and the way up to Gryffindor Tower." George explained.

And on the explanations went for a good half hour. Harry would ask a simple question and would end up being told some story of the twins' various misadventures in trying to escape. After that, they decided to leave and let Harry test the map out for himself. They told him to keep an eye on them until they were back in the Gryffindor common room. Harry did this, shaking his head in wonder as he watched them go. This would prove to be very useful in combination with his invisibility cloak. Once they were safely back in their tower - they had a near run-in with a Prefect patrolling the fifth floor - Harry touched his wand to the parchment and whispered, "Mischief managed." And, as told, the map's features went blank again.

The next trip to Hogsmeade wouldn't be for awhile. So Harry figured he could make a trial run one night to the Restricted Section in the library. Harry never saw the point to such a place, if it didn't exist to tempt students into trying to sneak in and do some reading. And besides, if Lupin wouldn't help him out in regards to keeping Dementors at bay, he could always see if there was something in the library about how to do it.

Smiling, Harry tucked the Marauder's Map under his glasses and wand on the table by the bed. Tonks was going to love hearing about this.

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"Aa... why do you get all the cool stuff?" Tonks asked, pouting.

"Because I'm the hero." Harry replied dryly. "For better or worse."

"Lucky. You're officially capable of more stealth than everyone else in Hogwarts combined." Tonks said.

The three Ravenclaws were in the Nest the following day. Harry had gone over what had transpired the previous night and gave Solieyu and Tonks a brief demonstration of the map.

"So you'll be coming to Hogsmeade one way or another next time?" Solieyu asked.

"Definitely. We'll meet up in Honeydukes, as one of the secret passages leads to its cellar." Harry said, grinning.

"Have you had any time to just wander around?" Tonks asked.

"Not yet. Next sleepless night I have, I'll be out walking the school, though. Not like I have to worry about being caught anymore." Harry said. "...I wonder if the guys that made this map know about the Chamber..."

"Probably not... Unless one was a Parselmouth like you." Solieyu said.

"So, you two - what are we going to do on Halloween?" Harry asked.

"Not get into trouble for once?" Solieyu mumbled.

"Now where would the fun be in that?" Tonks asked. "You know, you've seemed grumpy for awhile." She added, looking at Solieyu. "Wha's wrong? Your girlfriend not free to snog on Halloween?"

"Girlfriend?" Sputtered Solieyu, whirling around to stare at Tonks, who had a cattish grin on her face.

"Oh, come on..." Tonks started, leaning back and grinning. "You don't think we've not noticed how you and that Luna Lovegood girl are around each other, do you?"

"I... that's not... girlfriend?" Solieyu said, sounding baffled. "...And what're *you* giggling about?" He demanded, staring at Harry, who had dissolved into laughter.

"You!" Harry declared. "I've never seen you get flustered before. It's quite amusing! And if she isn't your girlfriend, why are you blushing?"

"I'm NOT!" Solieyu stated, glaring.

"The hell you aren't!" Harry laughed. "You lit up like a bloody Christmas tree!"

"Luna and I, I'll have you know, are merely friends. She's too *strange* to even consider being anything more." Solieyu said, trying to regain his composure.

"I dunno, Leon." Tonks said, still grinning. "She *does* seem to be more coherent when she's around you. And she needs someone to look after her! Did you two hear what that prat Terry did to her?"

"What did he do to her?" Solieyu asked, looking at Tonks sharply.

After exchanging a brief smile with Harry, Tonks shrugged and replied, "Oh, not much. Only he stole all of her books and hid them. Seemed to think it was funny. They call her 'Loony Lovegood,' you know."

"Someone remind me how Boot got into Ravenclaw." Harry said, shaking his head. "Has Luna told anyone about this?"

"Dunno. It only came up between the two of us one day between classes. She asked me if I had seen her Charms book, I told her I didn't, and she just casually nodded and mentioned Terry pilfering her stuff! Like it didn't even bother her or something!" Tonks said, looking irritated.

"I'll have to... speak... with Terry." Solieyu said, his eyes going cold.

Tonks nudged Harry and, in a stage whisper, said, "Isn't it so sweet, Harry? He's defending her honor!"

Solieyu deflated slightly. "It's not *like* that!" He said, scowling. "I just don't find Terry's antics amusing. There's enough rivalry between the Houses. We don't need members of our own house harassing others in it."

"That and Boot needs a good scaring regularly to keep him in line." Harry added.

"That too." Solieyu nodded.

"Gonna turn on the ol' vampiric power and heft him into the air one-handed or somethin'?" Tonks asked.

"There are enough rumors flying around this place about me as is. I'd rather not get more started. But I can be very... pointed, shall we say... when I want to be. I'll just have to sit Terry down and have a good, long chat with him about acting like a gentlemen towards women." Solieyu said.

"Yeah, well, if you decide to throw that idea out the window and want to beat him up, let me know." Harry said. "That idiot makes me embarrassed to be a Ravenclaw."

"So when are you going to go harangue the poor dolt?" Tonks asked.

"After a nap, I think." Solieyu said, sitting down. "It's about time for another dose of that damned potion. Been sleepy lately."

"Ah, works for me. Tonks, wanna go skulking about the dungeons in search of hidden passageways?" Harry asked.

"How romantic." Replied Tonks dryly. "See, Leon - Harry knows how to treat a lady."

"Oh, shut up." Harry groused, blushing slightly.

"I'll be here if you two get bored." Solieyu said, yawning.

"...What, you're gonna take your nap *here*?" Harry asked.

"I see no reason not to. It's certainly more private and peaceful than our dorm." Said Solieyu.

"Well, there's nothing to sleep on, for one." Tonks said. "How're you gonna drift off on hard stone?"

Solieyu smiled. And, startling both his friends, he quickly changed forms. And, as the same giant wolf that Harry and Tonks had seen in

the Forbidden Forest, he laid down, lowering his head to the floor. He seemed to be grinning as best a wolf could.

"Okay, that was just creepy." Tonks said. "You can't be randomly doing that! At least *warn* us."

"That or do it so often we get used to it." Harry blinked. "I know you said you could. and I remember the form well... but seeing the change in person was just strange."

Solieyu rolled his eyes and let out a low growl.

"I think we're being dismissed." Harry said, raising an eyebrow.

"We love you too." Tonks said, sticking her tongue out as she opened the trap door. "We'll be up to collect your furry, languid butt later."

"Man, you're hammering the big words today." Harry said as he followed her. "Been staring at a dictiona--OUCH!"

Solieyu couldn't see it, but he had the distinct feeling that Tonks had just given Harry a firm punching. Chuckling, his eyes slipped up. It really was nice and quiet up in the Nest. The faint sounds of students on the grounds could be heard, along with the odd noise coming from the lake. Owls would fly past back and forth, making their rounds in and out. The wind blew in lazily, helping the large wolf to drift off even faster.

Solieyu Reinhardt definitely had his fair share of troubles. Falling asleep, however, was not one of them.

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Author's Notes: Why have I not gotten to Halloween yet? Jeez, I'm behind schedule here. Not a lot happened, save for the very distinct passing of the Map to Harry. I had almost forgotten about the dumb thing.

My sleep schedule's been all messed up lately, which is the primary reason this update's taken so long. I just haven't had the energy to do

much of anything. I also don't have anything grand to say about this chapter, really.

I would, however, like to thank the reader who PMed me recommending the fic White Knight, Grey Queen by Jeconais. It's Harry x Pansy, over 200000 words, and VERY well written. Search his pen name here at FFN to get linked over to the site containing his works. ...His? Her? Whichever, it's GOOD fiction. And it helped keep me awake long enough last night that I THINK my sleep schedule's almost righted. So cheers to you, Jeconais!

Next chapter... I've no ruddy idea. I need to write out what I want to do the next five chapters. Which I'll probably abandon two or three chapters in.

Post-Edit Update: I have, since finishing this, gone and done more than write out the next five - I've written to the END of PoAR! It looks like I'm going to have 19 chapters for this one, though I have the feeling that at LEAST two of them are gonna be hell of long. While writing, I thought of something VERY interesting in regards to how I'm going to start Goblet. I think all of you are going to get a kick out of it, too. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Hope you enjoyed the chapter! Until next time!

Chapter 10 – Fire and Bolt

Harry sometimes felt as though he was naturally behind all of the students born to wizard parents. It was partially because of this (with the other part being his natural tendency to want to learn) that made him sit and read spellbooks for hours at a time. He had run across a number of interesting and useful spells this way - things that wouldn't seem nearly as intriguing to those who had grown up seeing them regularly. Things like spells to wash the dishes and cook food, for instance.

He had also spent a fair amount of time looking up offensive and defensive spells, as the subject just seemed to draw him in. Plus he figured it wouldn't hurt to have a wide selection to use, seeing as how he seemed to regularly fight Lord Voldemort variants. It was during one of these learning binges that Harry ran across a bizarre little spell that was only briefly mentioned. It seemed, ages ago when travel by train was more often used, that railway worker wizards had developed many techniques to make their lives easier. It was designed to conjure spikes and sling them into the saddles to hold the rails together.

For whatever reason, Harry had taken a liking to this spell. He thought it had more to do with the spell's name rather than what it did, but explaining it that way made him feel rather stupid. He had given Tonks and Solieyu a demonstration of this spell a few days after Halloween, when they had gone off high alert.

"I still can't believe nothing happened." Tonks said, shaking her head slowly.

"I know. I suppose whatever incarnation of Voldemort was scared off by Black and the Dementors." Harry said. "Believe me, I don't *mind* the break, but still."

"So what was this meeting called for?" Solieyu asked, leaning back on his arms.

"Found a cool new spell and wanted to give it a try. I wish we could find a bigger place than this sometimes. Somewhere we can practice

spells and stuff without worrying that they'd get away from us." Harry explained. "...Anyway, check it out."

Harry held out a book to Tonks, then said, "I found it in there. Page 394."

"...The Bolt Thrower spell?" Tonks read, glancing up at him. "You thinking about workin' on the rails when you graduate, then?"

"Of course not." Harry said, rolling his eyes. "I thought it would be interesting to test its possibilities in a duel, actually. The last thing Malfoy would expect is a dirty great spike flying at his head. I managed to shrink a pillow from the common room into a more portable size to use as a dummy."

Harry pulled the miniature, blue pillow from his robes, enlarged it, and tossed it across the Nest. "Now watch." He said, grinning. And, pointing his wand at the pillow, he cried, "*Telum Conicio!*"

A large, spike-shaped burst of grey energy shot forth from the tip of Harry's wand, crossed the short distance across the tower, and embedded itself into the pillow. There was a burst of steam and, when it cleared, the trio saw that the magical spike had turned quite real.

"See?" Harry said, walking over and, after making sure the bolt wasn't hot, yanking it from the pillow. "It conjures after impact. But the magical bolt is really, really hot. Helped to drive it into rails, I suppose. So even if it doesn't hit and solidify directly, it'll leave you with a nasty burn."

"Oh, please say we can try strategically aiming one so it burns the arse offa Malfoy's robes." Tonks said, grinning.

"You two need less free time." Solieyu said, lounging back and closing his eyes.

"Oh, shut up." Harry said. He vanished the bolt and sat down, aiming at the destroyed pillow and fixing it up again. "We need less time. Who's been napping regularly up here?"

"Potion's making me sleepier than normal." Solieyu said, biting back a yawn. "I'm doing good to be up and coherent at the moment."

"So tell us," Tonks said, prodding Solieyu in the leg. "Does changing into a wolf drain your energy? Does *holding* the form?"

Solieyu opened his eyes again and looked thoughtful for a moment before replying, "The initial transformation requires a small amount of energy... but holding it doesn't. I just need to have a bit of concentration on it. Of course, if I'm up and moving about, I get tired more easily. I did good to hold off those blasted spiders last year. I was completely worn out by the time I made it back to the castle."

Tonks nodded. Then, after a moment of silence, asked, "So what about other forms? I know you said you can't change into a bat yet..."

"Yes, I suppose my vampiric growth can be related to my magical growth. As I grow older, my powers get naturally stronger. I simply don't have the power to change into anything more than a wolf." Solieyu said, shrugging. "I think it has something to do with the shape of the form. The wolf is relatively the same size. But a bat is much smaller *and* has the capability of flight."

"And after that?" Harry asked.

"Mist, if all I've read is true." Solieyu said. "Which is, of course, as difficult as it gets for vampires. You more or less force your body to dissolve entirely. As mist can change its size and shape at will, I'd be surprised if I learned it before graduating here at Hogwarts."

"That tough, huh? Can't imagine how changing into mist would be useful, though." Harry said. "Unless you happen to lock yourself out of your house and left your wand inside."

"Or if you wanted to peep on people taking a sauna." Tonks said, causing Solieyu to give her a withering glare.

"Hey, Harry, have you talked to Lupin yet?" Tonks then asked.

"About anti-Dementor training? Not yet. Our next Quidditch match isn't for awhile, so I think I'm good until a bit before the game starts."

Harry said, staring up at the ceiling. "Maybe after the Christmas holiday..."

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The weeks came and went and before Harry knew it, the Christmas holidays were rolling around. It felt weird to him, as it had been quite possibly been the single longest uneventful period at Hogwarts yet. At the very least, he had a tough time remembering having a good two months of being a normal student.

Unfortunately, this meant that Harry was seriously pushing his luck with fate. And fate had a tendency of swerving around and biting him in the ass when he least expected it. Harry was at breakfast one morning, a week before the holiday vacation officially began, muttering darkly about Dementors and Slytherins and every other evil thing he could think of. Ravenclaw's next Quidditch match wasn't for a good while, but the fact remained - Harry had lost his precious Nimbus to the blasted Whomping Willow. It hadn't even occurred to him to ask about his broom, so it came as a complete shock when Fred and George told him about what had happened. No one had even seen fit to bring him his broom's 'remains,' either.

But Harry's luck worked on some sort of sadistic see-saw - when something really bad happened, it usually meant that something really good was going to. It worked in reverse, of course, but the bad luck usually led the way.

The morning owl post came in its usual way, causing students to cover their food up to prevent anything from getting in it. Harry, whose owl tended to do a lot of nothing, had no reason to ever pay much attention to the morning post. Because of this, he was doused in milk and egg bits as a frighteningly large owl dropped a package on the table in front of him.

Harry scowled and spelled himself clean again, then glared up, trying to catch sight of the infernal beast that had ruined his breakfast. But when Tonks let out a gasp, he looked back down. Her gasp was quickly followed by several others, not all of them Ravenclaws. Tonks had opened the already torn-looking brown paper the package was

wrapped in. Harry goggled when he saw it, his gasp lost in all the others.

Harry reached out, running his fingers along the handle of what was apparently an early Christmas gift from *someone*. A Firebolt, the newest model of broom on the market, was laying amidst spilled goblets and splattered ham. Immediately, Harry lifted his head to find Fred and George. He was surprised to see them gaping at the broom as well. When their eyes met, the twins' eyebrows raised even higher and they shook their heads in unison.

"Who the hell would send me one of these?" Harry whispered, reaching out and touching the Firebolt again. "These things are ridiculously expensive..."

"Maybe you have some rich relative alive somewhere?" Tonks suggested.

"Doubt it." Harry replied, pulling the Firebolt from its wrapping and holding it properly. "Otherwise, why would Dumbledore toss me back to my aunt and uncle's house?"

"You're gonna let me have a go on it, right?" Tonks asked quickly.

"Didn't know you liked flying that much." Harry said, looking aside at the girl.

Tonks shrugged. "It's nothing special to me is all. But still... to get to ride a real Firebolt?"

"Sure." Harry said, offering a shrug of his own.

"What seems to be going on here?" Came a squeaky voice. It came from just behind Harry, who jumped at it. Turning, he saw little Professor Flitwick standing there, looking up in curiosity.

"Someone sent me a replacement..." Was all Harry could say, nodding sideways at the Firebolt.

Professor Flitwick's eyes lit up. "Ooh, wonderful, wonderful!" He said, bouncing slightly. "Who's it from, Mr. Potter?"

"No idea." Harry said. "Tonks, was there a card or anything?"

Rummaging, Tonks nodded, handing a wrinkled-up sheet of parchment out. "Kinda landed in some juice, but it's still legible."

Harry glanced at the note, which simply read '*Saw what happened to your last. Try and keep hold of this one better.*' - it was written in a sort of shaky scrawl, as if the writer hadn't written anything in a long time. Harry held the note out to Professor Flitwick, whose eyes darted across the parchment quickly. A strange look crossed his face and he looked up at the Firebolt.

"Professor?" Harry asked.

"Mr. Potter, would it be alright if I run some tests on that broom?" Asked Flitwick.

"Uh... sure, Professor, but... what for?" Harry asked.

"Well," Flitwick said, looking around nervously and motioning for Harry to lean in closer. Harry did so, though he had to bend over rather low at a weird angle. "You know how Sirius Black is out, right?"

"...You think *he* sent me this?" Harry asked, trying hard to keep his voice low. "But... why?"

"He might be trying to get to you, m'boy." Flitwick said, placing a hand on Harry's arm. "We're all a bit worried about that... I can have the staff inspect it, give it a good testing, make sure it isn't jinxed or cursed in any way. I promise to get it back to you by the next Quidditch match."

Harry looked hesitant, sitting back up and looking at his new broom. Sighing, he nodded, holding the Firebolt over to Flitwick, who looked decidedly odd holding something that was taller than he was. "Alright. Just... keep me updated, yeah? Kinda hard to let go of something like that..."

"Oh, I understand entirely, Mr. Potter." Said Flitwick, his voice back to its usual upbeat tones. "You'll need to get it back in time to get used

to it, I'm sure! Don't worry, don't worry. I'll personally see to it that it isn't handled improperly!"

And with that, Flitwick was quick to get to the staff table, where he had a conference of sorts with Dumbledore, McGonagall, Sprout, and Snape. Each shot Harry a different look - Snape's was naturally furious - as the conversation went on. Harry just groaned and let his head thump against the table. "That sucked."

Tonks gave Harry a comforting pat on the back. "He does have a point, I guess. But that's just cruel, taking it away like that."

"No, no, he's right, I know that... but damn it all, I was really hoping to get in the air again on that thing." Harry muttered.

"I'm going to just sit here and pretend like I have the slightest clue as to what I've just sat here and watched." Solieyu said, raising an eyebrow.

Harry snorted. "It's the newest model broom, Leon. Best out there now. Professional Quidditch teams'll be using those. They're insanely high-priced. Makes me wonder who *did* send it..."

"You think it *might* have been Black?" Asked Tonks. "I mean... me and mum are pretty well off, but she's never mentioned anything about a family fortune."

"I honestly don't know." Harry said. "I don't know anyone rich enough to afford one of those... Well, except Malfoy and his family. And let's be honest - what're the chances of *him* sending me a Firebolt? Even if he were to curse it, it's still a *lot* of money to blow."

"It's a shame you both missed the look on Malfoy's face." Solieyu commented. He was sitting opposite Harry and Tonks and had had a clear look at the blonde. "He looked like someone just told him he was going to be executed."

Harry chuckled. "Well, even if the Firebolt *is* hexed, I suppose something like that would make it alright."

"Here's to hopin' it isn't, eh?" Tonks said, glancing over her shoulder at the Slytherin table. "Pfft. Look at 'em. They're all huddled in and whispering. Not like it takes a detective to figure out why. Dunno why they're bothering."

"Malfoy's probably gonna try getting daddy dearest to get the whole Slytherin team Firebolts. That won't fly at all." Harry said. "So to speak."

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It took nearly a month, but two things had made Harry's life a lot happier. First, he had gotten the Firebolt back at lunch one day. Professor Dumbledore himself had delivered it on his way in, declaring (in a voice he surely had known would carry to the Slytherin table) that it was a perfectly normal, uncursed broom.

The second was that Harry had all but perfected sneaking into Hogsmeade. It was pretty easy getting in and out of Honeydukes' cellar, since the back room that lead down to it wasn't near the cashier counter. On his first trip in, he had nearly run into the owner, who had chosen the worst possible moment to come down for resupplying merchandise. After that, Harry acted a bit more carefully.

Sneaking after Solieu for so long had only helped his stealth. Combined with his cloak and the Marauder's Map, Harry was confident that he would never get caught again. The only way it would be possible if someone was able to see through his invisibility cloak. And, a sneaking suspicion of Dumbledore aside, Harry severely doubted he'd run into someone who could do that kind of thing.

Harry, who had developed a severe sweet tooth in a very short time, had a bad tendency to make emergency Sugar Quill runs. He would leave money in place of the sweets and hurry back to Hogwarts before he was missed. He had pondered writing a note that explained why he was swiping the Quills in such a manner, but he hadn't learned of any charms to prevent someone from tracing a letter back to him, so he decided against it.

Unfortunately, too much sugar in his system led Harry to becoming hyper and overactive. The up side to this was that the Nest finally had

proper furnishings. For whatever reason, Harry's magic seemed to ebb and flow strangely when he was hyper, which had led to some odd happenings during the decoration process. Harry had brought various, easily replacable objects up to transfigure. A pair of old socks from the Dursleys had turned into a rather nice, curved sofa. But then, in an attempt to make a matching chair, Harry had formed a mutant of sorts. The back of the chair still looked like a sock, and the seat was lumpy and deformed. None of the legs were the same length, and the thing had an armrest sticking up from the center.

With some help from Tonks and Solieyu, they were able to fix the poor chair and get the rest of the Nest spruced up. It wasn't fancy, but it was better than sitting on cold stones all the time - especially in winter. A simple, round rug with a charm on it that kept it warm in cold weather and cool in hot weather. A set of charms over the door leading out onto the circular balcony prevented wind from getting in. And, with a few trips to the library and some tests involving stones later, they had added a spell to prevent anyone from falling over the balcony's railing.

"I still say we did pretty well, considering I was on a sugar high at the time." Harry said, flopping down into the chair.

Tonks sat down on the arm of the chair, which was modelled slightly after the one Harry always sat in in the common room, and nodded. "I'm just glad we fixed that elephant-man chair you made. Else it would've been all 'nurrrr I am not a sock nurrrr' and stuff."

Harry pouted slightly. "It wasn't *that* bad."

As Tonks patted Harry on the head, (to which he scowled) Solieyu was standing in the doorway and glancing out over the ground.

"I don't think the Dementors are happy." He said, turning back to look at his friends.

"Dementors can *be* happy?" Tonks asked. "Great. Thanks, Leon. Mental image of a conga line of soul suckers in my head. That's pleasant."

"I'm serious." Solieyu said. "They just seem...uneasy. They've been gathering around the lake an awful lot. I don't think they can go underwater..."

"I'd love seeing the giant squid fight off a platoon of Dementors." Harry said, smirking.

"I'd be placing my bets on the squid." Tonks said.

"Speaking of fighting Dementors, Harry..." Solieyu said, walking over and sitting on the sofa. "Have you talked to Professor Lupin about how to do that yet?"

"Mm, no. Tell you what, I'll go down and do it now while it's on my mind, alright? Might need to glance at your notes for Charms homework if it takes too long, though."

"No problem." Tonks said. "Now get outta here and lemme sit in this chair properly!"

Snorting, Harry got to his feet and gestured snobbily to the seat, which Tonks happily slid down onto. "I'll be back later, guys. Have fun studying!"

"Says the guy going to do something a lot harder than working out Charms work." Solieyu said dryly.

"Yes yes, I know what I'm getting myself into. I think. Anyway, stop distracting me!" Harry said, sticking out his tongue as he hefted the trap door open and descended the stairs.

Tonks drew her wand and closed the trap door, rolling her eyes. After a few minutes, she glanced up. "Hey, Leon?"

"Hm?"

"Whatcha think Harry's chances are?"

"At learning to repel the Dementors? Mm, I'm not sure. It can't be easy. Some part of me says we should be down there learning it with him, but..."

"Yeah..." Tonks said. "Best to let him go it alone. He works better that way, despite our best efforts..."

"His upbringing imprinted that on him, I'd wager." Solieyu said. "He's not had to count on others before. He's definitely getting better at it, but this is still a fairly large thing to learn. I'm sure he'll pass on how to do it to us once he has it down."

Tonks nodded. "Yeah..." And, while she tried to take her friend's words to heart, she couldn't concentrate on her homework. Her thoughts kept turning to Harry and what he might have to go through. After struggling with her thoughts for awhile, she sighed and shut her Charms book, setting it and a barely-written-on piece of parchment on the floor next to the chair.

"Go to him." Was all Solieyu said as she stood.

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Author's Notes: No one egg me for the title! And yes, the description and execution was kinda bad. Things work out better in my head than in text form. But I do have some reasons for introducing the spell here, aside from the fact that I just like the term 'Bolt Thrower.' It may TAKE awhile, but JKR loves to throw in random crap early that comes back later on.

Now... onto what I'm sure some people might be thinking. What do I think of the actress cast as Tonks for the movies? Well, the only pics I've found are from some play she's in, and it was pretty tough to tell from those. Mugglenet didn't exactly help, what with that ittybitty mugshot and all. I'm hoping to see some in-costume pics in the future, so I'll reserve judgement until then. I try not to let the movies mold what I do, despite the movie's version of Lockhart being the basis for how I wrote him in Chamber Reopened. So I doubt it'll have any impact.

Next chapter, the fun finally sets in. Patronus learning time! Plus an unexpected fight will break out over someone's honor! Not a whole lot of forward momentum, per se, but the two major events I have planned will hopefully interest people enough. As I said awhile ago in my profile, I'm planning 19 chapters. Whether or not it gets to 19 is

anyone's guess. Me, I'm a little worried the story will be too short, like Chamber was. I'm glad Goblet's got a ton of crap to deal with. Goblet's gonna be fun to write.

Until next time, folks!

Chapter 11 – Glinting Silver

Harry sighed as he walked the halls of Hogwarts. Something was bothering him and he just couldn't figure out what. Perhaps it was the general peacefulness of the school year. He had, sadly, already become used to adventures breaking out within the school's walls. And, Sirius Black's apparent strike on Gryffindor Tower aside, nothing had really happened. Harry didn't want to call the year boring, really, but something just seemed to be missing. A part of him wondered if he was weird for *wanting* something bad to happen just so he could have something to do outside of the daily tedium of classes.

And on that note, Harry was getting rather fed up with his classes. Only half of his classes really interested him. He certainly wasn't going to jump up and down in the Great Hall and proclaim his love for Potions or History of Magic, anyway. He was glad that Lupin was a competent teacher... but Harry felt he was taking things too slowly. He didn't care if he knew the *proper* way to get a Grindylow to bugger off. He wanted to learn about proper defense techniques. He wanted to understand the deeper meaning to what separated supposed dark magic from supposed 'light' magic. And calling it light magic was so wholly stupid in Harry's eyes.

"Magic itself shouldn't be classified like that. Doesn't it come down to the wizard casting the spell that determines how it's used?" Harry had once said, bringing the subject up with Tonks and Solieyu in the Nest. The conversation had lasted a few hours and, in the end, Harry thought he had gotten his friends to understand where he was coming from. He had even defended the Killing Curse. "Let's say a damned giant or something was coming to try and crush your face, alright? Would you throw a jelly-legs curse at it and *hope* it fell over, or would you want to stop it outright? There's a lot of things out there that would kill you at the drop of a hat, you know. I'm just saying - there's no sense in calling things Dark Arts when it all comes down to the situation..."

Arithmancy aside, (Harry had determined that he wasn't quite as good with numbers as he had originally hoped) he was also having a fairly easy time of his classwork. Charms came especially easy to him,

though he had random issues with Transfiguration, depending on the mood he was in at the time... and how much sugar he was laced with.

Harry was also annoyed by the fact that he really had no place to test out the magic he was learning just from reading stuff he picked up in the library. He was quite irritated to find that conjured food - like the handy apple spell he had found ages ago - didn't really have any effect on his hunger. It seemed food created from nothingness also filled him with nothingness. It was a shame, since he had learned to conjure up a number of edible things before he had learned this bit of information.

Harry was starting to get more into offensive magic. Up to that point, he had mainly focused on defensive spells. Tonks had asked about this one time, and Harry had simply replied that if he couldn't keep himself safe, he wouldn't be *doing* any fighting back. He had to keep from getting hit if he wanted to return fire, after all. Most of the subjects Harry read about had been covered in one class or another, though. It was why he wanted to get into the Restricted Section so badly. There *had* to be more interesting reading material there.

Without realizing it, Harry had made his way to the Defense classroom and had been standing in front of it for a few minutes before he returned from his thoughts. Taking a deep breath, he knocked on the door. A moment later, Lupin's voiced called out from inside. "Come in."

Harry pushed open the door and stepped into the empty room. Lupin was sitting at his desk, grading homework. He glanced up at Harry and, seeing who it was, set his quill down and smiled. "Harry! What brings you here today?"

Sighing, Harry walked up to the front of the class. "Professor," He began, rubbing at the back of his neck, "Have you had a chance to talk to Professor Dumbledore about, y'know, the Dementor fighting...?"

Lupin observed Harry briefly, then answered, "I have. But, as I've said, it's very advanced magic. You may not be able to learn it. Albus thinks it's alright for me to teach you the spell if you really want to, just know that it's difficult."

Harry nodded. "I know... But I can't keep blacking out around the stupid things. I've *got* to learn."

"Very well." Lupin said, getting to his feet and motioning for Harry to follow him. "After I spoke with Albus, I was able to find another Boggart. This one was Binns' office. I don't think he even realized. I've relocated it to a desk in *my* office..."

Lupin led Harry into his office at the top of the room's stairs. At the far end of the room, a faintly-shaking desk could be seen. Lupin shook his head as he watched it. "Makes it right difficult to grade papers on it, which is why I was doing it out there."

Harry could feel himself getting nervous and he tried to shove the feeling aside. He had to be strong for this. He couldn't let the effects of the Dementor - even a fake one - get to him. If he was to have any chance at repelling the creatures, he needed to be able to face one down without passing out first.

Leaning against the wall, Lupin watched Harry as the boy's eyes steeled over. "Now then, Harry," he began, getting the Ravenclaw's attention again, "The spell you're going to be learning is called the Patronus Charm. Very few wizards and witches can properly pull it off. Even I can only produce a vapor of sorts with it. The way it works is this; you need to think of something that makes you happy to use it. Remember something that made your life better, some special event that happened, a memory of the past... As long as it's a truly happy thought, it'll work."

"And will I also start flying and seeing pixies, Professor?" Harry asked wryly.

Rolling his eyes, Lupin continued, "Once you've got your memory, we can begin. The problem, of course, is holding *on* to that memory once the effects of the Dementor set in. As I'm sure you well know, they suck away all your happy thoughts, which is why the spell is perfected by so few. You've got to overcome the Dementor's power in order to fight them. Now, the incantation is '*Expecto Patronum*' - got it?"

"Expecto Patronum." Harry repeated, nodding.

Lupin went over to a bag on his desk and pulled a rather large bar of Honeydukes' chocolate from inside. "I'm only willing to do this training in short bursts, you understand. Three times or so per lesson, depending on how you do. I'll give you some of this in-between 'rounds' to help get you feeling better. If I see you're visibly not recovering enough from the fake Dementor's effects, I reserve the right to end the lesson, understood?"

"Yes, Professor." Said Harry.

"Very well. Find your happy memory and let me know when you're ready to begin, alright?"

Harry shut his eyes. Happy thoughts? Harry didn't have very many of those. Living with the Dursleys certainly didn't make him happy. Having a murderer on his heels didn't, either. Snape would probably just as soon poison Harry than teach him. He had nearly *killed* his Aunt Marge. The only memories of his parents were what the Dementors had forced him to relive. Harry scowled - he needed less angst in his life.

Nearly five minutes later, Harry opened his eyes again, looking toward Lupin and nodding. Lupin, who had watched Harry carefully, nodded in return. The man felt a surge of sympathy towards the boy. Had it really taken that long just to find a single, decent memory to use?

"Alright, Harry... Are you ready? Wand out?" Lupin asked, moving towards his desk and levitating around to face Harry.

Drawing his wand, Harry nodded again. He knew what memory he was going to use. It was one of the few things in his life that had really meant something. A look of fierce determination crossed his face as Lupin threw open one of the lower doors on the desk. The Boggart, in Dementor shape, swept forward quickly.

It wasn't as easy as Harry had hoped. He had refrained from speaking to Lupin, keeping his mind focused like a laser on the memory he had chosen. But as soon as the door was opened, the memory had threatened to be torn from his mind. Harry grasped to keep it in place. He tried focusing his mind, but his mother's screams

had started, which was a very real distraction for him. His vision started to blur.

'No... No, dammit! He thought, desperately. 'I can't pass out! I can't lose the memory! I'm not going to look like an idiot in front of a friend of my parents...!'

Harry aimed his wand, his arm shaking violently as he forced himself to keep his balance. The Dementor had extended a bony arm towards him as it drew closer. That single gesture sucked all the resolve out of Harry's body. He dropped to one knee, clamping his hands over his ears. Somewhere far away, he heard Lupin's voice cry something out. And then, just as abruptly as it had started, the Dementor's effects stopped.

Lupin knelt down in front of the boy, who was panting rather heavily, and broke off a piece of the chocolate bar. "Eat. You stayed up longer than I expected you would, Harry."

Harry took the chocolate gratefully, popping a large bite of it into his mouth and chewing. A warm feeling washed over him immediately and, once he had finished with he, he muttered, "Couldn't even say the incantation, though..."

"I didn't expect you to. I told you, Harry, this is difficult work." Lupin said, placing a comforting hand on Harry's shoulder. "Finish the rest of that bit of chocolate off, compose yourself, and we'll try again, alright?"

Harry nodded and Lupin stood, walking over and leaning back on the desk. Harry ate the rest of the chocolate and, after getting his breathing back to normal, stood up as well. A moment later and his happy thought was firmly back in place. He did, however, take a few steps back from where he had started the last time. "Couldn't hurt to try." He said aloud.

Smiling, Lupin asked, "Are you ready?" When Harry nodded, he gave a countdown and threw the door open again.

Harry gritted his teeth as a freezing cold wind seemed to circle around him.

'Not this time...' He thought, narrowing his eyes as the false Dementor glided forth. *'I won't fall again...!'*

And indeed he didn't. But he began wobbling so much in the end that Lupin had to call the Boggart off once more. Swearing darkly under his breath as Lupin approached with the chocolate again, Harry balled his hands into fists.

Lupin, seeming to sense what Harry needed to do, quickly transfigured a nearby chair into a giant pillow. Harry stalked over to it, gave it the hardest punch he could, then slung a half dozen curses into it. Panting slightly after the venting session was over with, he gave a weak smile to Lupin. "Sorry," He said. "Frustrated."

"Perfectly alright, Harry. Eat up." Lupin replied, breaking off another piece. "You did far better that time, though. Stand back a bit further and you might do even better. You just need to be quick about it. Right as I open the door, try casting the spell. Don't give the Boggart enough time to fully envelop you in the Dementor's power."

Harry nodded, quickly downing the bit of chocolate he was given. "Right."

Harry stood nearly at the back of Lupin's office, this time, wand aimed for where the Dementor's head would be. With a nod, Lupin once more opened the desk's door. And once more, the feeling of utter darkness seemed to try and crush Harry's spirit.

'If this is the best I can do, I'll never get anywhere...' He thought, mentally screaming. *'I won't be able to protect anyone from them, let alone myself! What if those things escape one day? What if they come for me? What if... what if they came for...'*

Lupin tensed when he saw fury flash in Harry's eyes. His teeth bared, Harry let out an entirely feral growl as he yelled, "**EXPECTO PATRONUM!**"

A burst of silver light erupted from the tip of his wand. It flew at the fake Dementor and, if a mist-like object could do such a thing, crashed into the creature's midsection. The Boggart Dementor let out a horrible, unearthly noise and backed away. And still, Harry kept his

focus on the spell. The Dementor retreated back into its safe haven in the desk, the door slamming shut on its own. Once the Boggart had shut itself off from the room, Harry let out a breath he hadn't realized he had been holding. And, at the same time, the silver light faded away.

Harry dropped down to his knees, his breathing shaky. But as Lupin approached, he heard the boy letting out a quiet, weak laugh. "Well done, Harry." Said the man as he knelt down in front of Harry again.

"Wasn't gonna let it get me three times in a row." Harry breathed.

"If I may ask, what kind of memory did you choose?" Lupin asked, handing the rest of the chocolate bar to Harry.

After eating a few bites of it, Harry said, "I... I'd rather not say."

Lupin nodded. "I understand. It's just I noticed you looking rather angry before you cast the spell."

Harry flushed slightly as he glanced up at Lupin. "Uh... yeah, well. Something got in the way of the memory, see... It was like... Oh, I don't even know how to explain it."

"It was like the Dementor was going to take away the source of the memory so that it never existed?" Lupin offered.

"Something like that." Harry murmured.

"You did very well for your first lesson, but I think that was enough for one day. You'll need the rest of the day to properly regain your strength. Let's schedule our next lesson for the same time next week. Is that alright with you?" Lupin said.

Harry nodded, slowly getting to his feet. "Yeah... yeah, s'fine with me. I really appreciate this, Professor."

"Not a problem, Harry. It's the least I could do, considering..." Said the Defense Professor.

Harry looked up at him questioningly, but Lupin had already walked past him, heading back out into the classroom. "I don't want you trying to use the spell against a real Dementor, Harry. There are too many roaming the grounds. Handling a lot of them is very different from handling a solitary one. You'll find that Dementors seldomly go off on their own. They are, such as it is, pack hunters."

"Don't worry." Harry said, following Lupin. "If I never saw another Dementor in my life, it'd be too soon. I just... want to be prepared. Just in case."

Sitting at his desk in the classroom, Lupin smiled up at Harry. "An admirable trait, that. Always good to be prepared for the worst. Being caught unawares and unprepared is a dangerous thing. Have you read much about Dementors?"

"A bit. Nothing I've read has ever said where they come from or how to kill them, though." Harry said.

"Probably because no one really knows." Said Lupin. "I'm not even sure it's possible to kill Dementors. The Patronus Charm merely drives them back."

"Best to live and escape than fight and die?"

"Something to that effect."

Harry sighed. "What if something happens to Azkaban one day, Professor? Did... did the Dementors escape during Voldemort's last reign?"

"They did." Lupin said, nodding. "They joined his side up until the end. The only reason they stay at Azkaban at all is because they're well fed there."

"Why travel across the whole of Great Britain when they can stay at home and get served, huh?"

Lupin chuckled. "Indeed. Now then, go on and get some rest. Even with the chocolate, you still look rather shaken."

"Yeah... that spell really sucks the strength out of you, doesn't it?"

"It does. Combined with the effects of the Dementors, it's a bit of a double-edged sword. But fortunately, the negative effects of the Patronus Charm lessen as you get a better handle on it. One week, Harry. Rest up until then."

"Thanks, Professor. I will." Said Harry, turning to leave. His legs still felt unstable. He didn't think he'd be heading for the Ravenclaw common room just yet. He *really* didn't feel like trying to get into the Nest. He'd probably collapse on the winding stairway and tumble down, breaking his neck.

And so, Harry decided that a trip down to the lake would be a good choice. He could relax out there and stay until it was time for the evening meal. But just as he opened the large double doors and stepped outside, he heard a soft voice say, "You alright?"

Turning his head, he saw Tonks leaning up against the outside of the school.

"Uh... yeah, I'm alright. ...Wait, why're you asking me how I am?" Harry asked.

"I was watching." Tonks said, tilting her head to look back at him.

"Wha... where?"

"Just outside the door to his office. I saw you do it... that was really impressive. ...Why did Lupin say you looked angry?"

Harry opened his mouth, paused, then glanced away. "Because I did, I guess. It's hard to explain."

"Yeah... heard that, too. Try anyway?"

"...I can't." Harry said, slipping his hands into the pocket of his jeans.

"Why not?" Tonks asked, turning to walk closer.

"It's embarrassing." Harry muttered.

"Harry... you realize what we've been through together so far, right?"

"Of course I do."

"Then *tell* me. I swear I won't tell anyone. Not even Leon." Tonks said.

"Why's it so important you know, anyway?" Harry shot back, his voice harsher than he wanted it to be.

"...I wanna know what made you happy enough to cast the spell. And what made you angry about it." Tonks said, her voice quiet.

Harry closed his eyes and sighed. "Look... it's not important, alright? I just... got caught up in thinking about it. You know I overanalyze things. I just... got to thinking about Dementors getting loose and going after people. People I care about..."

"So your memory was about a person, then." Tonks said.

Harry winced, still looking off. "Not telling."

"Stingy." Tonks said, prodding Harry's shoulder.

"And what about you, you little eavesdropper?" Harry said, finally turning to look at Tonks. "How come you were spying on us, anyway?"

"I wasn't spying!" Tonks said. "I was just... um..."

"Yes?"

"Oh shut up! I wasn't spying! Just... uh... wanted to make sure it was nothing dangerous?"

"Not very convincing there, Nymmy."

"Don't call me Nymmy, dammit!"

"Then don't go spying on me!" Harry said, shooting Tonks a glare. "Changed my mind. I'm going back to the Nest."

"Oh no you aren't! You'll never make it up the stairs!" Tonks declared.

"Watch me!" Harry huffed, turning and stomping back into Hogwarts, Tonks hot on his heels.

"You're no Gryffindor, knock it off with the bravado, Harry!" Tonks said, catching up and grabbing onto the back of his robes. "You're not gonna go and tumble down stairs and. and break your neck or something in a fit of machismo!"

"Oh, gonna follow me now, too, huh?" Harry asked.

"Jolly right I am." Tonks said, glaring at the boy. "Why're you so bloody worked up over a simple question, anyway? This isn't like you! Just tell me what was going on inside your head!"

"I don't want anyone knowing what goes on in my head!" Harry said, returning the glare. "I don't want anyone to know what goes on in there!"

"Why?" Tonks cried. "Why's it so important that you keep it to yourself? What's so important that you can't tell *me*?"

Harry started to shoot back a reply, but stopped again and sighed. "Look... if you really wanna know, just... just get me to the damn Nest and I'll try and explain, alright? Will that make you happy?"

"Yes."

"Fine. Now help me up the ruddy stairs."

Tonks did so and the two walked in silence for awhile, Harry staring at the ground with glassy eyes and Tonks occasionally giving him worried looks. They were nearly to the hidden entrance to their tower when they heard the unmistakable sounds of arguing nearby. Arguing that, for the first time in awhile, wasn't coming from *them*. It sounded like it was coming from just around the corner past the entrance. The two Ravenclaws glanced at one another and headed for the source of all the racket. But just about the time they reached the corner, a sizzling, red bolt of energy flew past, slamming harmlessly into the wall.

"You think you're better than I am?" Roared somebody. "You can't dodge forever!"

"Can't I?" Came another, calmer voice. "I've been resting up for awhile. I daresay I could stand here and not get hit until midnight. How *did* you get into Ravenclaw?"

"Terry." Tonks and Harry muttered at the same time. The two peeked around the corner, intent on learning what was going on without interfering just yet. After all, if Terry Boot was going to get thoroughly beaten in the hall, they wanted front row seats. And from the sounds of the other guy, Solieyu was going to be the one doing the butt-kicking.

They didn't, however, count on one unknown factor. Harry and Tonks gave each other another look, this one of surprise, as they noticed a third person in the hallway. Her already large eyes looked even larger, if it were possible. She was standing somewhere between Terry and Solieyu, off to one side.

"Think Boot kissed Luna, too?" Harry asked in a whisper.

"Dunno. I know Leon is fond of her, though, even if he won't admit it." Tonks whispered back.

The two saw Solieyu's head jerk to one side briefly and knew they had been found out. His enhanced hearing, Harry figured. But he did nothing else to acknowledge they were there. Instead, he turned back to Terry, who had his wand out and was somewhat hunched over. Whatever had been going on seemed to have been going on for awhile.

"As I was saying... Keep away from her, Boot. You don't *want* me to counterattack. Because I'm stronger than you, I'm *faster* than you, I could certainly do more damage to you than you could do to me... And you don't want me as your enemy." Solieyu said, his voice dangerously cold.

"You aren't the boss of me, Reinhardt. Stop acting like you're so much *better* than me! I can snog whoever I bloody well feel like!" Terry yelled.

"Not when the recipient wants no part of it. Are you so hard up for a girlfriend that you'll just corner lone girls and try forcing them to do things against their will? That's a very stupid thing for a Ravenclaw to do. There's a word for that type of thing, you know. As I'm to understand, you also kissed my friend Tonks against *her* will, as well." Solieyu murmured.

"She liked it!" Terry sneered.

"From what I heard, Harry put you under an interesting illusion that you didn't take too well to. Would you care to see what it's like in real life? I know ways of making it possible." Solieyu said, ice in his voice.

"You wouldn't dare." Terry said, smirking at Solieyu.

"Wouldn't I?" Solieyu asked. "I'm *very* protective of my friends, Boot. And when someone I care about is being harassed, especially in such a physical manner, I get mad."

"What're you gonna do, *wilt* on me? You always look like you're gonna collapse!" Terry laughed. "What the hell could you possibly do to *me*?"

"Ten seconds." Harry whispered to Tonks.

"Five." Tonks replied, grinning.

"You're on." Harry said.

Solieyu shot forward quickly, something Terry obviously wasn't expecting. The other boy backpeddled and flung a random spell towards Solieyu. Solieyu ducked off to the side, but the spell caught and tore the arm of his robes. It also apparently nicked his skin, as a small smattering of blood hit the floor.

"Uh-oh." Harry said.

"Uh-oh?"

"Blood."

"...Uh-oh."

Solieyu came to a halt, turning to stare at the blood on the floor. He then raised his arm and inspected the cut he had received. Tentatively touching the injured area, he hissed and pulled away the blood-soaked tip of his finger. Harry couldn't see the look in his friend's eyes from where he was, but the expression on Luna Lovegood's face told him all he needed to know.

Harry nodded to Tonks and the two stepped out from around the corner, wands drawn and aimed at Terry. "Tonks, round up Luna and head for the hospital wing, would you? I need to have a little talk with Boot."

"Roger, captain!" Tonks replied, saluting Harry with a grin and bouncing over to Solieyu quickly. "Leon. **LEON!** Snap out of it, mate! C'mon, don't go showing poor Luna that side of you! Look at her, the poor girl's half scared to death!"

Solieyu shuddered violently and turned, his eyes glossed over and wide. He started back up the corridor towards Harry as Tonks went over to Luna. The two exchanged a few words then caught up to Solieyu.

"Keep his eyes off his arm." Harry murmured softly as the trio of Ravenclaws passed by him.

"Will do." Tonks said. "Good luck."

As Tonks, Luna, and Solieyu rounded the corner, Harry started towards Terry. "You just don't seem to learn, do you? I should have let Leon tear you apart for doing that again!" He growled.

"Playing the hero again, Potter?" Terry asked, sneering once more.

"Always." Harry shot back, his voice almost a hiss. "And you're going to come along with me to Dumbledore's office. **NOW.**"

"And how do you plan on making me?" Terry asked, defiantly.

To that, Harry just smiled darkly.

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Author's Notes: I diverged from my chapter plan already. Again. Oops. But I thought this ending would both provide an awful cliffhanger AND give me a good way to start chapter 12, so I hope nobody minds. Originally, things were going to be like this: Harry and Tonks walk in on Solieyu, already enraged and physically walloping on Terry. But then I figured Leon would only be acting like that if he had missed his potion. And since he's at Hogwarts again, Madam Pomfrey would have some measure of control over him in that regard. So no seeing psychotic vampires just yet!

And then there's the fun of what Harry's memory is. I'm sure it's no guess to anyone here what got Harry's fire going, so to speak!

Hopefully Chapter 12 will be out before the end of the month. Valentine's Day approacheth and, seeing as how that day is HORRIBLE for single folks like me, I'm sure I'll be able to generate enough emo-ness to provide motivation. The next chapter will get padded by the second half of this encounter and everything that happened after. And maybe what Harry's memory was. Plus it includes a trip to Hogsmeade, and separate encounters with both Malfoy and Snape! See you then!

Chapter 12 – Invisible

"**CRUENTO!**" Harry roared.

"Not again, you won't!" Terry growled, rolling out of the way and firing a hex back at Harry, who easily avoided it.

"True." Harry said, smirking. "There are much more interesting ways to handle you. *Argentum Incendia!*"

A burst of silver light erupted from Harry's wand. Terry tried to put up a shield charm to stop it, but it broke through and connected with the boy's shoulder, which lit up in white flames. Terry yelped and immediately doused the fire with a water spell, but his shoulder had taken a good burning.

"*Umbra Contero!*" Terry bellowed, bringing his wand down in an arc.

"Don't you try using shadows on *me!* **UMBRA MURUS!**" Harry spat, aiming for the ground. A dark wall burst up from it, interrupting the equally dark-colored spell Terry had used. Harry quickly banished the wall, glaring at Terry, Harry murmured, "I'll make sure you don't get back into the Tower in one piece. Assaulting two girls in my House? Not wise at all, Boot."

"All talk, no action. Everyone else may fawn over you, but I don't give a damn how famous you are or *why!*" Terry hissed.

"All the better you didn't. *Umbra Subsisto!*" Harry yelled, trying the same spell he used against Draco Malfoy last year.

Terry, who had been there for the match, quickly evaded the spell, slinging back a few of his own, which Harry avoided.

"Dammit, stop moving! I oughta nail you to the bloody floor, you stupid sod!" Harry ground out. And then, out of nowhere, inspiration hit. "Let's see how you like being assaulted and not being able to get away."

"Make sense, Potter!"

Aiming down at Terry's feet, Harry jerked his wand in a pair of matching, quick motions as he yelled, "**TELUM CONICIO!**"

Two spike-shaped bursts of grey light flew from Harry's wand. Terry tried moving backwards, but only succeeded in avoiding one of the beams, which smashed into the ground and solidified with a burst of smoke and a hiss. The other beam of light crashed into and through Terry's foot, where it too solidified. The hiss of this one was drowned out by a scream of agony from Terry.

Harry rushed forward, Accio-ed the avoided bolt out of the ground, and drove the flat end of it into Terry's face. There was a sharp CRACK that came from his nose, which caused the boy to howl even louder. He was quickly silenced as Harry clocked him in the temple with the heavy, metal object. Terry sank to the ground, out cold.

Harry quickly vanished the twin bolts, did what little he could to heal the gaping wound in Terry's right foot, and cast a spell to levitate the boy into the air. With a smile on his face, Harry happily announced to no one in particular, "Off to Dumbledore's office we go!"

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"Enter." Came the voice of the old headmaster.

Harry did so, poking his head into Dumbledore's office. "Sir?"

Dumbledore blinked. "Harry! To what do I owe this visit? Come in, come in."

"Business, I'm afraid. And I would, but I dunno if you want blood all over your office flood." Harry replied.

"Blood? Are you injured, Harry?" Asked Dumbledore.

"No, but this hefty load is." Harry barked, pushing the door all the way open and toting Terry's body in behind him. Tiny droplets of blood occasionally dripped from one of his shoes.

Dumbledore's eyebrows disappeared into his hair. "My goodness. What has happened here?"

Harry gave a recount of what had happened, including his usage of the Bolt Thrower spell. He also included the fact that Terry had done the same thing to Tonks once in the past. Dumbledore sighed as he looked at Terry. "I'm afraid that's *not*, in fact, the second time this has taken place."

"Sir?"

"Mr. Boot seems to have made it a habit of stalking girls about. Two Hufflepuff girls and a Gryffindor have reported to me that they had been... handled improperly... by Mr. Boot."

"Why hasn't he been expelled?" Harry cried, disbelief in his voice.

"The reports all came very close together." Dumbledore said. "I summoned Mr. Boot to my office and we had a... discussion, of sorts... about his behavior. He had promised me that he would change his ways. It would appear he has not. I take it Ms. Lovegood and Mr. Reinhardt are well?"

"Dunno. Haven't been to the hospital wing yet. Knocked out this idiot and brought him here first thing." Harry said.

"While I do not approve of your methods, I do thank you for bringing this to my attention. Come, I will escort you to the hospital wing. I am afraid Poppy might have a fit if I did not." Dumbledore said, getting to his feet and motioning for Harry to follow him.

Harry did so, still levitating Terry's body behind him. As they walked, Dumbledore said casually, "I believe... two weeks worth of detentions for using such force would do the job, don't you?"

"Yes, sir." Harry said. In all honesty, Harry thought he was getting off pretty light, given he'd put a dirty great hole in a Housemate's foot. "Uh, sir... what about the blood? I'm not good with healing charms, but I did the best I could."

"It will be taken care of." Said Dumbledore.

When they arrived in the hospital wing, it was to see Madam Pomfrey fussing over a shirtless Solieyu. His injured arm had been bandaged up, but he looked like chilled-over hell.

"Hey, Tonks!" Harry called out, smiling pleasantly, as if he *wasn't* bouncing a bleeding body behind him.

"Hey, Harry!" Tonks called back. "Ooh, what'd ya do to him?"

Madam Pomfrey glanced over and let out a sort of odd squawk. "**WHAT INDEED!**" She cried, storming over. At this point, Dumbledore stepped in front of Harry and drew his wand, taking hover-the-idiot duties away from Harry, who quickly slipped over to his friends so the headmaster could deal with the angry matron.

"Bolt Thrower right through the foot." Harry whispered, grinning widely. "Tried to get both of 'em, but one missed, so I plucked it and broke his nose then knocked him out with it instead."

"Points for using the missed spike." Tonks said, raising her eyebrows.
"What'd ya get for it?"

"Two weeks." Harry said. Then, turning to look at Solieyu, he stated, "You look *awful*."

"Thanks." Solieyu replied, dryly.

"Where's Luna?" Harry asked.

"Pomfrey sent her back to Ravenclaw Tower." Tonks said. "Gave her a little talk, said if anything was bothering her, she could come talk to her. Was the sweetest I've ever seen Pomfrey being."

"A rare sight indeed. What're you looking so haggard over, anyway?" Harry asked, looking at Solieyu again. "Only nicked your arm and triggered your bloodlust, didn't it?"

"*Quiet!*" Solieyu hissed, glancing over to the other group, which was standing near a bed that now held Terry Boot. Madam Pomfrey had one of the boy's shoes off and was making wild gestures with her arms. "...It's been awhile since my last potion. Next dosage is in a few

days. The surge of anger that stemmed from him hurting Luna like that combined with everything else... I feel like crap."

"Enough to swear slightly, I see." Harry said, grinning. "Man, you guys should've seen the look on Dumbledore's face when I bounced Terry in."

"You managed to surprise Dumbledore. That'll be one you can tell the grandchildren!" Tonks said, snickering.

"Urgh, that's too much thinking of the future. Besides, I hate kids." Harry said, firmly.

"But Harry," Solieu said, voice dry again, "Tonks does seem eager to have little ones bouncing ar--**OUCH!**"

Tonks had clocked Solieu in his scratched arm, glaring at him and blushing. "That's enough outta you, Count Dracula."

"Don't call me that." Solieu said, pouting as he rubbed his arm. "Merlin above, she's got an arm on her. How do your arms survive getting hit so often, Harry?"

"Built up an immunit--**OUCH!** Dammit, woman!" Harry cried, rubbing one of his arms now and glaring daggers at a smug-looking Tonks.

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Shortly after a thoroughly enjoyable Christmas, (Most of the students had gone home - Harry, Tonks, Solieu and, surprisingly, Luna had stayed behind) another Hogsmeade trip was due. Harry, sick of being cooped up inside Hogwarts' walls, had decided to join his friends in town. They had decided to meet up near the Shrieking Shack, which was supposed to be extremely haunted.

"I can't wait!" Harry said, stretched out on the couch in the Nest.

Tonks, who was sitting sideways in the chair opposite Harry, rolled her eyes. "Honestly, it's not as if you've never been outside the castle before."

"No, but this time I'm not just nicking some Sugar Quills." Harry said, grinning over at his friend.

"You're acting like a little kid." Tonks said.

"Am not!" Harry said, sticking out his tongue.

"Oh really?"

"Yeah, really!"

Tonks gave Harry the evil eye, swinging her legs around so she was sitting in the chair properly. "Anyway, get this - Solieyu popped up earlier while you were in Arithmancy and asked if we could bring someone else with us."

"Someone else?" Harry repeated. "...Oooh, don't tell me..."

"Yup!" Tonks said, eyes gleaming. "Heeee's going with Luna into town. I dunno *how* he convinced Dumbledore to let her come along!"

"Must trust that she'll be safe with Leon. And us." Harry said, smirking. "Maybe this'll make him less nocturnal and irritable."

"Leon's never irritable." Tonks said. "You're thinking of yourself, mate."

"Hey! I'm not irritable either!" Harry grumped.

"I believe you just showed that you *are*." Tonks pointed out.

"Wh... Hey! Don't try screwing with my brain! I'm distracted." Harry declared, crossing his arms.

"Heee... you're gonna be more distracted in about five seconds." Tonks said in a singsong voice.

But before Harry could ask what she meant, she had pounced onto him - quite literally - and began tickling him for all she was worth. Harry let out a hoarse wheeze as he laughed, trying to shove the girl off of him. But he only succeeded in leaving himself open to more

tickling. It only ended when he managed to choke out, "Can't... breathe!"

Tonks stopped tickling, but sat back and grinned as Harry tried catching his breath. "See? Toldja."

"You... are an evil... wench!" Harry gasped, giving Tonks a half-hearted glare.

"Awww, is ickle Harrikins mad that he was caught off-guaaaaard?" Tonks asked, leaning over and patting Harry on the head.

Swatting Tonks' hand away, Harry growled, "Stifle it, *NYMMY*."

"Don't call me Nymmy!" Tonks shouted.

"'Ny' then?" Harry offered.

"'Ny'?"

"Sorry. Not myself today, I guess." Harry said. He thought for a moment, then shrugged, grinned, and asked, "Nymphadora, then?"

"Do you wanna get tickled again?" Asked Tonks, glaring down at him.

"Ack! No ma'am! Heck no at all!" Harry said quickly, raising his arms in front of him.

"Good! Now apologize!"

"I'm terribly sorry you can't take a joke, Nymm--**gwahhh!**" Harry began, only to get cut off as Tonks launched a second assault on him. He let out a surprised yelp, trying to *roll* out from under Tonks this time. Unfortunately, the couch wasn't wide enough to complete such a maneuver. What happened instead was Tonks crying out as she toppled off the couch, only to get landed on as Harry trailed helplessly after.

"Oomph! Geroff! What've you been eating? Depleted uranium?" Tonks asked, swatting Harry about the head until he pushed himself up and off of her.

"Sorry!" Harry panted, looking down at the girl under him. "You okay? Didn't hit your head on the ground or anything, did you?"

"I'm fine." Tonks huffed. "Wind knocked out of me from you *landing* on me, but fine otherwise."

"Sorry, Nymmy." Harry murmured, leaning his head down and kissing the girl on the forehead.

Tonks started to tell Harry off for calling her Nymmy again when she got kissed. She then let out a quiet squeak and blushed, looking off to one side.

Harry smiled, shifting his weight to the right and flopping down next to the girl so that she was looking at him. "Wotcher. Something interesting over here?"

"Just you." Tonks said, poking Harry in the chest.

"What's so interesting about me? Aside that I seem to be a magnet for lunatics." Harry asked.

Tonks rolled her eyes again. "Life would be right boring without you, you know that?"

"Guess you'll just hafta keep me close, then." Harry said.

Tonks grinned. "How close?"

"I dunno." Harry said. "How close do you want me to be?"

Tonks let out a giggle and scooted closer, giving Harry a kiss on the forehead in return. "Close enough to do that?"

"Your aim was a little high, wasn't it?" Murmured Harry, gazing into Tonks' eyes, which were currently an icy blue.

"Yours wasn't any better." Tonks replied, her voice soft.

"I can try again if you'd like." Harry said, grinning crookedly.

"By all means." Tonks said, feeling her cheeks light up. Her eyes slipped shut moments later.

Harry swallowed hard, his own cheeks feeling rather warm. He leaned forward, closing the distance between them. He licked his lips, which had become incredibly dry at some point, and took a deep breath.

Just before his lips made contact with Tonks', the trap door flew open and in walked Solieyu. And he wasn't alone. Harry jerked his head to the side, Tonks' eyes snapped open and she did the same. Solieyu and Luna Lovegood stared down at the two, both of them wide-eyed.

"If we interrupted something..." Solieyu began slowly.

"Nothing!" Tonks squeaked, sitting up quickly.

"Yeah! Nothing!" Harry said, nodding and getting into the chair just as quickly.

"...Riiight. Uh... anyway..." Solieyu began, stepping all the way into the Nest and indicating Luna to follow. Once she had, he closed the trap door behind them. "I was thinking... I hope you two don't mind, but I thought we could let Luna into our little group. Besides, she uh... she caught me walking through the false wall and followed."

"Sure!" Tonks said, grinning at Luna. "It'd be nice having another girl to talk to."

Luna tilted her head and looked around the sparsely decorated tower, then sat down on the couch and smiled at Tonks. "I'd like that, Nymphadora."

"Don't call me--" Tonks began, but Solieyu raised a hand.

"She uses my full name, too. It's impossible to get her not to. Best save your breath." Solieyu said, glancing aside at Luna.

Tonks pouted. "Oh, fine..."

Harry grinned up at Solieyu. "Sooo... Nymphadora here--" Tonks gave Harry a death glare - "was just telling me. Got a date this Hogsmeade trip, do ya?"

"He does." Luna replied, smiling peacefully and looking just off to the left of where Harry was sitting.

"Uh... Yeah, uh... I guess I have..." Solieyu said. And, for the first time Harry could remember, the long-haired boy blushed.

Harry and Tonks exchanged a glance. And, after an initial blush had passed between them, they grinned. They were never going to let Solieyu hear the end of *this* one!

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"I heard it's really a pack of Groaning Glumbumbles..."

"Say what?"

Luna turned to look at Tonks and, in a voice one would normally use to explain something very simple to a child, repeated, "The Shrieking Shack. It's infested with Groaning Glumbbles. It shouldn't be called the 'Shrieking' Shack at all."

"Well what would *you* suggest it be called?" Tonks asked.

Luna thought for a moment, then smiled and replied, "Why not call it the House of Horrible Hissing?"

Tonks nearly fell over on the spot. "Wait, what? Why hissing?"

"Because Glumbbles don't like being prodded, of course." Said Luna, as if it were the most obvious thing ever.

"Right..." Tonks said slowly. And then, quietly in an aside to Solieyu, muttered, "Your girlfriend's off her nut."

"Hey!" Came Solieyu's indignant reply.

"Where's Harry, anyway?" Tonks asked, crossing her arms. "It's bleedin' cold out here!"

A soft voice then murmured, right next to Tonks' left ear, "I can offer to warm you up if you'd li--ACKK!"

Tonks squeaked, starting down at the crumpled form poking out from under an invisibility cloak. "Oh, Harry! I'm so sorry! Dammit, but don't sneak up on me like that!"

Harry groaned, pulling himself back to his feet and hiding back under the cloak properly. "Sorry... But the offer stands. Want under here with me? I cast a warming charm on the cloak. Dunno why you haven't done the same with your coat and stuff, but..."

Tonks blinked. "Oh yeah. That mighta helped a bit..."

"Mighta." Harry agreed.

"It's a good thing I can't see you, else you'd get a good left hook to the arm." Tonks scowled.

"Talking to yourself, dear cousin?" Came a drawling voice.

Tonks twitched, twirling around to glare at Draco Malfoy, who was flanked by his usual pair of cronies. "Oh goodie, Malfoy is here. What do you want? Looking to be hexed?"

"As if you could hex me." Malfoy replied, smirking.

Tonks felt something nudge her in the arm. She blinked and looked off to the side, but didn't see anything. Grinning, she looked back to Malfoy and said, "If you'd like us to bury you in the snow, we'd be all too happy to do that!"

Malfoy's eye twitched slightly, but he quickly slid a mask of indifference on before speaking again. Looking at Luna, he said, "I see you've replaced Potty. Honestly, could you lot get any worse a taste in companions? What do they call you again? Loopy?"

"Loony, actually." Replied Luna with a vague smile.

"Yes, Loony. You'd have to be Loony to hang around with that lot, though, I suppose..." Draco said, looking thoughtful.

Solieyu stomped towards Malfoy, only to have his path blocked by Crabbe and Goyle, who stepped out in front of the blonde. The long-haired boy smiled. "I'm not the one you should be worried about."

"What are you talking abo-- what the!" Malfoy said, getting pelted in the back of the head by a very large snowball. Whirling around and seeing no one, the blonde called out, "Who's there?"

"They say the Shrieking Shack is the most haunted building around." Solieyu said, smiling pleasantly. "I wouldn't be surprised if the ghosts came out to play."

"Don't be stupid, you-- *HEY!*" Once more, Malfoy was cut off by a large snowball colliding with him. It was quickly followed by a few more off to one side. Malfoy pulled his wand and aimed randomly, eyes darting back and forth as if trying to find his assailant. "Come out, damn you! I know there aren't any ghosts out here!"

And just then, from directly to Malfoy's right, a horrible, distorted voice said, "How do yooooou know thaaaaat?"

Malfoy let out a shriek to make even the most obnoxious little girl jealous and, leaving Crabbe and Goyle in his wake, tore off back towards Hogsmeade. The bulkier duo were soon on his heels. Once they were out of sight, Harry twirled off his cloak in a flourish and grinned, making a X-shaped motion across his neck.

"Ooh, what was that, Harry?" Tonks asked, hopping over.

"Just a stupid little party trick the twins taught me. Said they used it to make Ron think a ghost wanted to boil him one year." Harry said, grinning.

"Ooh, that was mean of them."

"Yeah, but I figured if anyone deserves being spooked, it's Malfoy. Shame we don't have any photographic proof of him screaming and tearing off like that." Harry said, sighing dramatically. "Anyway, how was your trip, guys?"

"Oh, we've had a wonderful time." Luna said, walking over to Solieyu and latching onto one of his arms. "Solieyu offered to buy me some Blood Pops, but I had to decline because they're made with the endangered Jumping Beezleflump's blood."

"I see..." Harry said, cocking an eyebrow as his amused gaze went from Luna to Solieyu, who scowled in return. "Well, I made a quick sweep of the town after I got in - Honeydukes was packed. Took forever to get out - so I'm ready to head on back whenever you three are."

"Yeah, I think we've all got about ten minutes left before the group's rounded up. Meet ya up in the Nest?" Tonks said.

"Sure thing. Seeya later, Nymmy." Harry said, winking as he vanished under his cloak again.

Tonks couldn't help but make a face as she felt her cheeks warm up.

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"Mmm, Sugar Quills restocked." Harry said to himself, happily heading through the underground path that lead back into Hogwarts. It had been rather tricky to get through all the stores he wanted to visit without being seen - especially with Dementors lurking about. Thankfully, they kept themselves to around the edges of town. Harry had had to make a wide arc to meet and head away from his friends, but at least he hadn't passed out under his cloak. *That* one would've been an interesting dilemma to explain.

Once he was nearly at the Hogwarts end of the tunnel, he pulled out the Marauder's Map and activated it. Lighting up the tip of his wand, he examined it for signs of anyone around. Snape seemed to be a few corridors away, but Harry wouldn't have any trouble getting out into the hall before *he* got there.

Taking off his cloak and stuffing it into his robes, Harry then started pocketing the sweets he had picked up. He didn't want to carry around a bag of items that might incriminate him. Thankfully, he had purchased just enough to properly fill his pockets. He had spent a good while going over his buying plan. He hadn't quite worked out

how to magically enlarge the space inside his pockets, else he wouldn't have any problems at all.

When the statue slid aside, Harry squeezed through and out into the hall, glancing once more down at the map. Snape was still a couple halls over. Smiling, Harry stepped away from the statue. Unfortunately, he didn't get very far. He had taken too much time after stepping through and the statue had shut behind him. It had also caught the back part of his robes between it and the wall.

"Crap." Harry said, trying to reactivate the statue to get it to move aside. But the statue refused to move, having become quite irritable with doing so too often - or at least, that was what Harry assumed it was. It probably led a nice, stationary existance before he got the Map from the twins. They *had* said they didn't use the tunnel that much. On the other hand, he made fairly regular trips out of the castle.

"This is no time to seek vengenace, you bloody..." Harry muttered, trying now to simply tug his robes from between the statue and the wall. It took him a minute of careful tugging, but he eventually got free. Scowling, he grumbled, "I hate statues."

"I am sure they aren't very fond of *you*, either." Came a silky voice from behind Harry.

Harry froze, quickly tapping the Map and whispering "*Mischief Managed*" almost inaudibly before spinning around. "Hullo, Professor!" He tried greeting innocently.

Snape raised an eyebrow. "Hello indeed. Why would you seem to be standing in a very empty corridor, apparently having a tug of war with an inanimate object, praytell?"

"Snagged my robes on it, that was all." Harry said, shrugging. It wasn't a lie. Not technically.

"Really?" Snape said, in a voice that outwardly showed he didn't believe the story a bit. He glanced at the parchment in Harry's hand. "And what might that be?"

Scowling at the fact that he would never have been fast enough to stow the Map away before Snape saw it, Harry shrugged. "Bit of parchment. Was heading to the library to take some notes."

"Come now, Potter." Snape said. "Is that really the best you can do?"

"I have no idea what you mean, sir." Said Harry, meeting the man's accusing gaze.

"Then you won't mind if I inspect this!" Snape said, quickly snatching the blank Map out of Harry's hand before he could protest.

Snape gazed at one side of the parchment, then the other, narrowing his eyes. "Now what have we here..."

"Look, it's nothing but--" Harry began, but Snape cast him a glare that stopped him from continuing.

Snape drew his wand and pointed it at the map. He quickly murmured a few things under his breath that Harry couldn't catch. A few seconds later and the man was glaring sharply at the Map, then up at Harry. "*What is the meaning of this, Potter?*" He hissed.

"Meaning of what?" Harry asked, genuinely confused.

Snape turned the Map around so that Harry could see the front. On it, a number of rather less than flattering greetings were written. Apparently, whoever these Marauders were, they decided to make the Map insult anyone who tried to figure out its secrets.

"Look, I'm telling you, I honestly don't know what that's about." Harry said in all truthfulness. "I just--"

"You're lying!" Snape spat.

"And what, may I ask, is going on here?" Came a soft voice from behind Snape.

Remus Lupin was nearing, glancing with his head tilted slightly at the object in Snape's hands. "Taking parchment from the students, Severus?" He asked, smiling good naturedly.

"Quiet, Lupin!" Snape growled. "I was just about to hand out detention to Potter for rigging this... this..."

"I didn't do anything!" Harry said, raising his voice.

Clearing his throat, Lupin reached out to take the parchment from Snape, who reluctantly let it go. After examining the front of it, he chuckled. "Severus, this is obviously just some parchment charmed to insult whoever tries to use it. It's a bit advanced for a third year to make, wouldn't you say?"

"Yeah!" Harry said, earning him another glare from Snape. The greasy-haired professor then turned to Lupin, opened his mouth to say something, then apparently decided against it. He turned and stalked off, growling under his breath. Lupin watched him walk off, raising his eyebrows at one point.

"I don't think Albus would approve of him using that kind of language in front of the students." Lupin muttered to himself before turning to Harry. "Now then... would you care to tell *me* where you got this, Harry?"

"Uh..." Harry said, looking away from the Defense professor. "I can't. I promised."

Lupin nodded slowly before folding the Map up and pocketing it. "Very well. But you realize I won't be able to give this back, correct?"

"Why not?"

Lupin smiled. "Severus might not know the intricacies of something like this, but I do. At the very least, I'd like to show it to Professor Flitwick and get his thoughts on it. It does take a bit of advanced magic to make such an item, you know. I'm not sure if something like this should be in the hands of a student."

"But it's just... just a bit of parchment that insults people." Harry said, catching himself before he said anything stupid.

"Perhaps. And if it is, I shall give it back." Lupin said, smiling. "You can never be too sure these days. I'm sure you understand."

"Yeah. I don't ruddy like it but I understand." Harry said, making a sour face.

Lupin chuckled again, patting Harry on the shoulder. Before turning to leave, he looked over his shoulder and said, "Tell Fred and George Weasley I said hello, would you?"

Harry gaped, staring at the man as he walked off. Now what did *that* mean? Did he know that Fred and George gave the Map to him? Or had he caught them with it? What if he knew what the Map really did? But then... why did he lie to Snape's face? It might explain the *real* reason why he took it.

Scowling, Harry made his way towards the Nest. The students who went to Hogsmeade the proper way would be arriving any minute. And Harry wanted at least a few minutes alone to sit and think over what had just happened.

It was a good thing that Harry bought so many Sugar Quills. For some reason, staring off into space and sucking on the tip of one always helped focus his thinking. And he had a feeling he was going to need a bit of focus to try and unwrap what he had just witnessed.

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Author's Notes: I've been rereading a certain fic by Saerry Snape this week! Hence the blatant sort-of reference! Man, I've been churning out chapters pretty quick lately, haven't I? Blame the Valentine's Day Emorama. Urgh. Trouble is, I'm IN love... I'll just be too big a chicken to actually SAY anything to the party in question. Hurf.

Ah well. I figured you guys might like some Honks padding, seeing as how it's around Valentine's. Heee... I allllmost let them kiii-isssss... Okay, enough singsong teasing from me. Still, -I- thought the scene was fun. Especially when Leon and Luna burst in randomly. I'm such a jerk. :D

I'm not sure if I'll keep the Leon x Luna connection, as I think shacking up original characters with canon characters is a bit out there. But they do bounce off each other well, don't you think? Leon

really needs someone to loosen him up a bit, I'd say. And who better to do so than Luna? In any case, they're just sort of enjoying each other's company for now. I've got plans for everyone come Goblet Relit, so anything that happens here might not make it far THERE.

So what's up next? Well, we get some fun in the air as the Quidditch Final for the year takes place - yeah, I'm jumping forward a bit again. Plus we get a surprising visit from ol' rummy Trelawney! I dunno how long I'll keep this fast-chapter-writing thing going, but at least I didn't leave you lot for a month with that cliffhanger, now did I?

Happy Valentine's Day to all of those who have a special someone in your lives. And to those of us who are single - I wish you the best of luck. Me, I'm gonna try keeping busy today so I don't think about it too much. Until next time!

Chapter 13 – One Last Hurrah

February had arrived at Hogwarts. Thankfully, without Lockhart around to summon up a platoon of singing dwarves, Harry was much more relaxed. Which wasn't to say that he didn't get any valentines on the day in question - he had to have received a couple dozen of the things. And not all of them came from girls from Hogwarts. The ones that did, however, quickly got torn up by Tonks, who had taken on the expression of a lion stalking its prey.

Harry, being amused by Tonks' protectiveness of him, let her scare the wits out of anyone who might try and steal his heart away. Solieyu, on the other hand, wasn't as lucky. While he got a fair amount of valentines, he simply pushed them to the side, where Luna happily read them aloud. She then proceeded to rattle off a sappy (and outright bizarre) poem of her own. Solieyu wasn't entirely sure if it was supposed to mean something in regards to her liking him, so he just tried to ignore it - and the commentary from his 'friends' on the other side of the table.

"Awww, she thinks your hair looks like the blackest abyss!" Tonks cooed, forcing back a giggle. "C'mon, Leon! Get down on one knee and proclaim that you'll protect her for all eternity!"

Through gritted teeth - not to mention a fierce blush - Solieyu replied, "Stifle it, **NYMMY**."

"Hey! You can't call me Nymmy! Only Harry can call me Nymmy! Right, Harry?" Tonks cried.

"Right, Nymmy. *OUCH!* Dammit, you said I could call you Nymmy!" Harry said, nursing his arm.

"I said you're the only one who can call me it. I didn't say you wouldn't get slugged for *doing* it." Tonks stated.

"Bloody violent woman..." Harry muttered under his breath.

"As well as your fans should remember!" Tonks declared, smiling in a distinctly predatory manner.

"Harry!" Came a call from up the table. Harry turned to see Steven Lynch leaning forward. "We've got practice for the rest of the week! Be sure to get your arse down to the pitch at 6 every evening!"

"Six! Lynch, are you out of your mind? Why's it have to be then?" Harry called back.

"Because we're in the final, you twit!" Lynch said with a slight glare. "And I want you able to ignore that prat Malfoy while you're in the air!"

"If Malfoy gives me problems, I'll sling a bolt at his ponce-y head." Harry muttered. Then, louder, he said "Alright, alright. I'll be there. Just don't expect me to be all sunshine and roses!"

"Roger that." Lynch said, sitting back and rolling his eyes.

"A bit nutty, that one." Tonks said.

"You have no idea." Harry said, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "Right slavemaster, he is. I'll do fine this time. If Malfoy's in the air, he can't be attempting to reach the pitch in an awful Dementor getup. And since I've pretty much gotten the Patronus Charm down now, if any *real* Dementors hit the field, I'll be able to stop them."

"You sure?" Tonks asked. "You know, you *still* haven't told me what you're using to fuel that spell."

"I'll tell you eventually." Harry said, evasively.

"Come to think of it, I don't even know what *shape* it takes. Didn't you say you finally got it to form something last time?" Tonks asked.

"Yup."

"So what is it?"

"Not telling."

"Harry James Potter!"

"Ooh, all three names." Commented Luna.

"He's in trouble." Solieyu said, nodding.

"Shut up!" Harry and Tonks said at the same time, glaring at the other two.

"And very irritable." Solieyu added.

Luna, clasping her hands together and smiling, said, "They argue like an old married couple."

Harry and Tonks, who had resumed their silly back-and-forth, both stopped and blushed at this comment. And for the rest of the meal, neither of them could look at the other without blushing brightly.

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"Be careful not to fall off your broom this time, Potter!" Sneered Draco Malfoy.

"Be careful not to get trampled by a horde of *real* Dementors, Malfoy!" Harry sneered back.

The two Seekers had flown in circles, hurling insults back and forth since the start of the game. Harry wasn't particularly worried about the snitch - Malfoy wasn't anything to worry about. Nor were the Dementors that Harry could spot here and there on the grounds. He wasn't worried about the rest of the team, as the Slytherins were all muscle and no speed. And with his Firebolt, Harry was nothing *but* speed.

"It's a shame Black didn't attack Ravenclaw Tower instead, isn't it? Shame. But then, he seems to be so stupid, he'd probably mistake that bouncing trollop of yours for you and try killing *her*. Not that that would be a *bad* thing, mind you..." Malfoy drawled.

"Oooh - 'trollop!' I wasn't aware that you had a dictionary in your common room, Malfoy. Or that you had the capacity for reading! Five points for Slytherin! But you do know I don't take well to anyone insulting my best friend and least of all *you*!" Harry said, switching from a casual tone to a near-roar in seconds. Grabbing his wand, he aimed at Malfoy and snarled, "*Lacer!*"

Malfoy let out a yelp and managed to zip out of the way of the spell, which flew harmlessly by and dissipated after awhile. Narrowing his eyes, he too drew his wand, muttering quietly so that Harry couldn't hear what he would be using. When he did attack, it was in a flurry of spells, all of which Harry had little problem avoiding on his new broomstick.

"Your aim is atrocious, Malfoy! You wanna borrow my glasses?" Harry taunted.

"Don't you dare patronize me, Potter!" Malfoy hissed.

"Well somebody has to!" Harry called, grinning. "Might as well be me!"

"Shut your mouth!" Malfoy yelled, slinging another couple of spells at Harry, who once more avoided them. But when he looked over at Malfoy to resume his taunting, he saw the blonde grinning insanely.

"What the hell are...?" Harry began. But he was cut off by something white hot piercing his right shoulder. Harry let out a cry and quickly brought a hand up, blood trickling out over his fingers.

"What's wrong, Potter?" Malfoy asked, smirking. "Didn't like that? Didn't notice that one of them was charmed to arc around and fly back, did you? Typical Ravenclaw - thinks he knows everything *about* everything."

"Go to hell, Malfoy!" Harry hissed through clenched teeth.

"You first." Replied Malfoy, aiming again. Harry quickly started glancing around. If he fell and no one thought to bother catching him like Dumbledore had in the match where the Dementors had interfered, he would be in trouble. He and Malfoy were rather high off the ground. So high, in fact, that none of the other players of either team seemed to notice them.

Harry then caught a glimmer of gold out of the corner of his eye. The snitch was almost directly below Malfoy, who clearly hadn't noticed it, so busy was he in trying to kill Harry. Squeezing his Firebolt with the one hand he had on it, he promptly shot forward at Malfoy, who let

out a panicked cry and soared up higher, thinking that Harry was trying to ram him. But at the last moment, Harry shoved the tip of the Firebolt down, forcing it into a sharp descent.

When Malfoy looked down and saw that Harry was going for the snitch, he swore loudly and pulled his own broom into a dive. As he flew after Harry, he took aim and cried out a spell, the incantation of which was lost to the wind.

Harry, eyes on the snitch, didn't see the spell coming. And, at the angle he was at, the spell caught him in a bad way. Hit directly in the back, the spell threw him forward and off of the Firebolt completely. He let out a shocked cry, his attention to the snitch gone. But, in a brief moment of clarity, he realized that if Malfoy made it to where he had been, he'd be able to get the snitch.

Rolling over in midair so that he was facing the sky, he took aim and screamed, "**TELUM CONICIO!**"

A flurry of movement from Harry's good arm later and a half dozen searing hot bolts of energy issued forth from Harry's wand, tearing through the sky at Malfoy like missiles. And, just as the spikes had shot out, Harry then yelled, "**ACCIO FIREBOLT!**"

The broom tilted downward again and shot towards Harry. Harry pocketted his wand quickly and reached out for the broom, grasping it desperately as it got close enough. Using both hands (and ignoring the sharp pain coursing through his right arm) he wheeled the Firebolt underneath him, spun around so that he could see where he was, and let out a strained cry. He jerked back on the Firebolt with as much force as he could put into it, mentally shouting for the broom to pull up.

By now, everyone - players on both teams included - had stopped and had taken note of the aerial battle taking place above them. It didn't help that Harry was mere feet above the ground when he had managed to pull the Firebolt up straight.

After catching his breath and forcing himself to stop staring at just how close he had come to getting himself killed, Harry looked up and yelled, "**WHAT ARE YOU IDIOTS DOING?**"

Lynch was the first to snap out of the trance he had been in. "Get moving, you lot!" He cried at the rest of the team, who sprang back to life instantly. Seconds later, the rest of the Slytherin team did the same and the game resumed as normal.

Harry quickly looked up to see where Malfoy - and the snitch - were. Malfoy was circling above the pitch, his arm outstretched. The snitch was almost right in front of him. Harry let out a curse that he was sure would have given him a month's detention if any of the staff had heard him and once more pushed the Firebolt to its limits, the pain in his shoulder and arm ignored.

Malfoy was concentrating so much on getting the snitch that he didn't see Harry approach. It wasn't until Harry had risen between him and the snitch that it happened, and by then it was too late. Malfoy couldn't slow down in time and Harry couldn't pull away. The crowd let out a collective gasp as Seeker hit Seeker above the pitch. Malfoy managed to keep himself from colliding with the wall surrounding the pitch, but Harry - snitch in his good hand - couldn't keep himself conscious anymore. It had taken what had remained of his strength just to get to the snitch before Malfoy. He had won Ravenclaw the match; that was good enough. He triumphantly held the fluttering, golden ball up in the air. And then, shortly after, slipped off his broom and fell to the ground.

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Harry found himself sitting in a vast, empty field. Tall grass lazily blew in the warm, spring wind. He wasn't sure where this place was or how he arrived in it. He just knew that it was quiet and very peaceful. Without really thinking about it, he allowed himself to lay down, staring up at the clear, blue sky. There were no blonde idiots here. No murderer's hellbent on revenge. No Dark Lords trying to kill him.

Shutting his eyes, Harry let himself relax. It was only then that he noticed that his right shoulder was aching. And, for some reason, the whole of his left arm was as well. He frowned and raised his left arm, twisting it slightly. It didn't *feel* injured... so why was it hurting so much?

"S'broke, y'know." Came a voice from behind him. Harry tilted his head back to see Tonks sitting behind him, looking amused.

"Tonks? ...Wait, what's broke?" Harry asked.

"Your left arm, you daft sod." Tonks said, rolling her eyes.

"Doesn't feel broken." Harry said, sitting back up and feeling about the arm in question. Indeed, it didn't *seem* to be broke. It merely hurt a lot.

"Yeah, well, you're not gonna feel it *here*, are ya?" Tonks asked.

"...Where is 'here'?" Asked Harry.

Tonks shrugged. "It's your mind, mate. You tell me."

"My mind?"

"You're out like a light."

"Oh. Wait, how would I know if I was out like a light with a broken arm?"

"Beats me. Maybe your magic is trying to inform you of what's happening." Tonks said.

"My magic? Tonks, would you make sense?"

"Once again, mate - it's your mind. You're gonna hafta try and figure it out on your own." Tonks said.

"Dammit." Harry muttered. "I'm not very coherent, am I?"

"Obviously not." Tonks said, smirking. "How you manage to work anything out is beyond me. SO! What're you gonna do about me, then?"

"About you?"

"Yeah! Do you love me or don't you?" Tonks asked.

Harry gaped, his cheeks warming up. "Wha... Tonks, I... uh..."

"I'm not the real Tonks, remember?" Said Tonks, rolling her eyes. "I can look like you if you think it'd make this easier. I could look like anyone, really."

"Uh... I don't think talking to a copy of myself would make the topic any easier to bring up." Harry mumbled.

"Well, you needta make a decision soon, y'know."

"Why? Why can't I just keep things like they are? It's less complicated if love is involved." Harry said, looking at the ground.

"Maybe for you. Did you ever stop to think of how it is for Tonks, though?"

"...No. Not really." Harry admitted. "Why? Does she ... does she, y'know...?"

"Your mind, not hers. Are you *sure* you're a Ravenclaw?" Asked Tonks, cocking an eyebrow.

"Oh, shut up." Harry groused. "Look, I just... I dunno if I can say it yet. I dunno if I'm *ready* for love."

"Okay, now which of us are you trying to convince by saying that? Me or you? Because it's you either way. Not good, that." Tonks said.

Harry looked up at the girl. "But..."

"But nothing, mate. You can't fall *out* of love with someone." Said Tonks, getting to her feet. "And you need to start thinkin' of more than your own feelings for once. It's sweet that you picked meeting her as the source for your Patronus, Harry, really it is. But if she never knows how she makes you feel... it may not be the Dementors that take her away from you. It may be your own indecisiveness. Time to wake up, Harry. Try and remember the conversation we've had, yeah? One doesn't get to speak to oneself that often..."

Before Harry could reply, the field, Tonks, the sky, and everything else vanished, leaving him in a gaping, black void. Seconds later, the darkness was filled by a blinding, white light. He let out a sharp hiss at the brightness.

And then, the next time he was aware of was Tonks' voice murmuring, "Welcome back."

Harry cracked an eye open, scanning what was obviously the hospital room. Tonks - the real Tonks - was sitting in a chair next to him. Solieyu was at the foot of the bed. "Good to be bad." He croaked. "How long was I out *this* time?"

"Oh, just a few hours. Madam Pomfrey's already fixed your injuries. You had me damn scared, Harry Potter." Tonks said, glaring at him.

"Sorry, Nymmy." Harry said, smiling lazily. He was awake, but he felt severely drugged. Pomfrey must've forced some potions down his throat or something while he was out. "You look better outside of my head."

Tonks blinked. "Say what now?"

But Harry just let out a drug-induced giggle and shut his eye again. "Nothin'... I think I needta get sommore sleep, though. What'd that cackling harpie gimme, anyway?"

"Something to help heal the wound in your shoulder, something to help make your bones heal faster, and something to ease the pain of both sets of injuries." Solieyu said. "She said you'll probably be sleepy for a good day or two, but you have no permanent damage."

"Wha'bout the match?" Harry asked.

"You won." Tonks said, and Harry could just hear her grinning. "Lynch was practically crying, he was so happy. You're gonna be a right hero when you return to the Tower."

"Heh... glad I could make his last match here memorable." Harry murmured. "Tell him to save me a butterbear or two. And if he really wants to thank me, tell him to get me a case of Sugar Quills."

Tonks snorted. "Will do. Now you get some rest, Harry. We'll be back tomorrow to check on ya, alright?"

"Mmkay." Harry said through a yawn.

"Sweet dreams." Said Tonks, leaning over and kissing Harry on the cheek.

Harry listened as she and Solieyu walked out of the hospital wing. Suddenly, he didn't feel very sleepy anymore. But, eventually, the potions won out over his wanting to be awake and angst for awhile, throwing him into a nice, dreamless sleep. It was dark out when he woke up again. '*I've got a bad habit of this,*' he thought to himself with a scowl.

His whole left arm seemed to be throbbing with a dull pain, which kept him from drifting back off to sleep. Instead, he slowly sat up and moved his pillow so that he could lean back against it. His right shoulder was feeling much better, and it wasn't anywhere near as sore as his left arm was, so he used it to reach for his glasses. Thankfully, Madam Pomfrey had seen fit to leave a pitcher of water and a glass on the table next to the bed as well.

As he was getting a good, long drink in, Harry heard the doors to the hospital wing open up. He smirked as he heard a pair of hushed voices. Even without the Marauder's Map at their side, the twins had been able to sneak down to see him. How they had known he would be awake was anyone's guess.

"Told you he'd be waiting for us." Said Fred's hushed voice as he and George walked up.

"Indeed you did." George said, nodding solemnly.

"And how is the hero of Ravenclaw this fine night?" Asked Fred, smiling down at Harry.

"Ahh, but not just Ravenclaw - the rest of the school joined in with Ravenclaw's victory." George said, smirking.

"Well, all except Slytherin." Fred said, looking thoughtful. "Though I can't imagine why."

Rolling his eyes, Harry said, "Oh goodie, I get to be the center of attention! I'm *never* the center of attention! This will clearly be a new and exciting experience for me!"

"We hear," Fred said, ignoring Harry's smarmy reply entirely, "that you managed to get our beloved Map confiscated."

"Uh... yeah. Well, blame Snape." Harry said. "And that bloody statue. It decided to close on my robes and by the time I got them free, Snape was there. Lupin came to my rescue - oh yeah, he had told me to tell you two 'hello' for some reason - but he took the Map in the end... Sorry, you two."

"Hmm. Now why would our favorite Defense Professor take an interest in our Map?" George asked, brow creased.

"I think he might know what the Map really was. When Snape had it, all it did was make snarky comments to him." Harry said. "I don't think the Map liked him very much. Anyway, to what do I owe a visit by you two tonight?"

"Ah yes!" Fred said, his face lighting up.

"We came down to fill you in on the ongoing saga of our ickle Ronnienkins and his love-hate relationship with our dear Hermione Granger!" George explained.

"Oh, lord. What now?" Harry asked.

"Well, Ron was afraid that Hermione's awful, ugly cat, Crookshanks, had eaten his awful, ugly rat, Scabbers." Fred started.

"Which caused them to have a giant row over, by the way." George interjected.

"Yes, another one. They have them regularly, see." Fred said. "Well, they were going down to comfort Hagrid one day..."

"Wait," Harry interrupted. "Why were they going to comfort Hagrid?"

The twins blinked. "Tonks and Leon didn't tell you?" Asked George.

"Tell me what?" Harry asked.

"Well, you know that hippogriff Hagrid brought to show you lot? The one that tried having a Malfoy kabob?"

"How could I forget?" Harry said, grinning.

"Well, Malfoy told his old man about it, apparently, because that Buckbeak is scheduled to be executed soon." Fred said.

"What!" Harry cried. "Can he do that?"

"Guess so." George said, shrugging. "Seems Hagrid is doin' good at not showing that he's upset to his classes, but Ron and Hermione both said he was doin' a good bit of crying when they went down to see him."

"Which leads back to our story." Fred continued. "They were down there, trying to comfort the poor guy and, hiding off under his bed, was Scabbers!"

"Well, Hermione and Ron got into it on the way back *from* Hagrid's. Hermione wanted an apology out of Ron." George said.

"Imagine that." Fred added.

"And, after things settled down, they've been trying to work out a way to save Buckbeak. Hermione's actually gotten Ron to sit with her in the library in an attempt to find a way to exonerate a hippogriff." George said, shaking his head slowly. "They've come a long way in a short time."

"Yeah. And given how irritable Hermione's been all year, that's saying something." Fred said.

"Why's she been irritable?" Asked Harry.

"No idea. We've tried asking her, but she won't tell us. We've tried following her, but she always just seemed to vanish into thin air somehow." George said, scowling. "We don't know how she's pulling that off, either, which annoys us to no end."

"Heh. Maybe she's a ninja in disguise?" Harry suggested.

"Nah, she'd have ninja starred our dear brother in the bits by now if she was." George said. "You have any ideas on how she's avoiding us so easily? If it helps, it seems she's just appearing as randomly as she's vanishing, according to Ron. One moment, he'll be next to an empty seat and the next, Hermione's there. Ron's never heard her approach or leave once."

"Hmm..." Said Harry, frowning. "I dunno... but I'll see if I can't find us an answer next time I get some free time."

"That's our Harry!" Fred exclaimed, slapping Harry on the shoulder. Harry let out a wince, a hiss, and a swear, then gave Fred the evil eye until he backed away with his hands up in front of him. "Right, sorry."

"Did we tell you how bloody *brilliant* that flying of yours was?" George asked.

"Not yet." Harry said, rubbing his right shoulder, which wasn't happy about being slapped.

"Bet you didn't hear the shriek that all the girls made when Malfoy knocked you off your broom." Fred said, grinning stupidly.

"You're gonna have half the girls in school asking if you're alright for ages." George added, smirking.

"Oh joy." Muttered Harry.

"Was quite a show you put on, though. That one'll be talked about for years to come!" Fred said. "...Well, anyway, we were en route to the kitchens for a midnight snack when we decided to check in on you and both give you news and something to ponder!"

"Just in case you can't get back to sleep." George said. "Pomfrey seems to enjoy only giving enough of a potion to knock you out for *half* the night. Both of us have been on the receiving end of those. Right boring just sitting around."

"Thanks, you two. Always good to know what's happening elsewhere. I'll have to talk to Tonks and Leon about Hagrid. I'm sure they could help us try working out what's up with Hermione, too." Harry said.

"No problem! Want us to bring you back anything?" Asked Fred.

"Nah. Not hungry right now. I think one of those potions is suppressing my appetite for the time being." Harry said.

"Suit yourself! Let's go, brother o' mine!" George said.

"After you!" Fred said, bowing with a flourish.

"Get outta here, you two hams!" Harry cried.

"At once!" The twins said in unison, scampering out of the hospital wing and leaving Harry with his thoughts.

"Disappearing and reappearing, huh?" Harry said into the silence that fell back over the room. "Well... she can't be apparating - you can't do that on Hogwarts grounds. I'm pretty sure she isn't popping in and out of secret passages... even *Ron* would notice something like that. Hmm. Very interesting... very interesting, indeed..."

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Harry was released the following afternoon. Tonks and Solieyu had come to visit him that morning, and he related everything the twins had reported to him to them. Both seemed surprised about Hagrid and Buckbeak, though it looked as if realization was dawning on Solieyu. "I wondered why things seemed 'off' with him lately." He had said.

To Hermione's strange comings and goings, Tonks and Solieyu agreed to help Harry work out what was really going on. If nothing else, it gave them something to do besides sit around and work on

homework all the time. It wasn't healthy, even for Ravenclaws, to spend all their time working and reading.

Harry had promised to meet them at lunch and he was on his way down there when something very odd happened. He had just stepped around a corner when he nearly collided with Professor Trelawney. A Professor Trelawney, he noted, that smelled strongly of alcohol. Harry blinked, certainly not used to seeing sauced staff wandering the halls.

"Um... Professor? Are... are you alright?" He asked, tentatively.

Trelawney looked down at him, blinking her eyes owlishly a few times. "Ahh... if it isn't Harry Potter..." She slurred, hiccupping once. "Too good to stay in my class, I see..."

"It isn't like that, Professor..." Harry said, rather unsure of how to deal with the woman. The only other drunk he had dealt with was his Aunt Marge. And Trelawney didn't seem the violent type at all. Indeed, if anything, she seemed to whine a lot when she was drunk.

She prattled on for a good while about the degradation of youth and how no one bothered trying to see with their third eye anymore. Harry politely listened to the woman's near-incoherent babbling for awhile before his stomach let out a tremendous growl. When it did, he looked apologetically at the woman and said, "Ahh, I should probably go get something to eat, Professor. Um... will you be alright...?"

"What? Oh, yes, yes. I'll be fine. I'm always fine." Said Trelawney, dismissively. "Up in my tower dealing with bratty little children who think my subject is merely a joke! A **JOKE!**" Here, she stopped and hiccupped again. "Oh dear. Yes, just a joke to you lot these days... back in my time..."

Harry mentally groaned as the woman veered off again, speaking of how children respected their elders in *her* day. Figuring she would babble on whether he was there or not, Harry sidestepped her. He had just passed by her when she reached out and grabbed him sharply by his injured shoulder. He sucked in a breath and spun around, jerking his shoulder out of her grip.

It was then that he noticed the distinctly far-off look on her face. She opened her mouth to speak again, but her words were clear and her voice didn't seem to be her own anymore. *"It will happen soon! The Dark Lord lies alone and friendless, abandoned by his followers. Soon, very soon, the servant will break free and set out to rejoin his master! The Dark Lord will rise again with his servant's aid, greater and more terrible than ever he was! Soon... yes, very soon indeed... the servant... will set out... to rejoin... his master!"*

A deep chill coursed through Harry's body as the almost distorted voice of the teacher spoke those words. And then, she seemed to slump a little. Her eyes came back into focus. She blinked owlishly at him again. "Oh, Mister Potter... good day. What are you doing here?"

Harry took a step backwards. What had he just heard! Could this batty old woman have just made a *true* prediction of the future? She didn't seem to realize what had happened. And she still seemed as drunk as she had before. But her voice was clear and free of stutters and slurs when she had spoken of the Dark Lord's return. Taking another step back, Harry turned and quickly ran off up the hall. He needed to get to his friends. *'No, no!'* He thought, trying to force his mind to think clearly. *'I need to get to Dumbledore first!'*

However, both parties were probably going to be in the same place - the Great Hall. Harry realized this shortly and headed there as quickly as he could. He was winded by the time he walked in, but, thankfully, the headmaster was at his usual place at the staff table. Ignoring the clamor that had erupted from his arrival - mostly sneers from the Slytherins, cheers from the Ravenclaws, and hushed talking from the other two houses about the Quidditch final - Harry walked up the center of the room.

"Sir!" He said, out of breath. "I... I just met up with Professor Trelawney on my way here. She... she seemed *drunk* and..."

"Oh dear." Said Professor McGonagall to Dumbledore's side. "She does have a bad habit of that. Albus, should I...?"

"If you would be so kind, Minerva." Said Dumbledore softly. As McGonagall got to her feet, he turned his attention back to Harry.

"She... she was incoherent and kept talking about ungrateful kids and... and when I went to pass by her to come down to eat, she grabbed my shoulder and... I dunno, her voice went all strange and... and I think she predicted Voldemort's return." Harry said, keeping his voice low.

Dumbledore's eyes seemed to question him further. Harry looked off, trying to concentrate on what Trelawney had said. He repeated her words as best he could remember them. When he was finished, Harry asked, "Do... do you think that really means anything, sir? Do you think that one of Voldemort's servants could really restore him from... from whatever it is he is now?"

"I am not sure, Harry... but I assure you, I *will* look into the matter. Thank you for bringing this to my attention." Said Dumbledore, inclining his head towards Harry slightly.

Harry nodded in return and, feeling that their conversation was at an end for now, turned and headed for his usual place at the end of the Ravenclaw table. When he arrived, Tonks and Solieyu immediately questioned him about what was going on.

"Later. In the Nest." Harry muttered.

His friends exchanged a worried glance.

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Author's Notes: Holy crap, and the update-o-thon continues! With another fairly lengthy chapter, no less! You may note that I slightly reword the prediction of Trelawney's. Why? Because things are not going to happen 'tonight' - there's still a handful of chapters left to write and that kind of thing won't be happening until later on! So I figured I'd have ol' Sybill wandering drunk! Drunk Trelawney is something that should be seen more often. And I have a feeling that, when McGonagall DOES find her, she'll give the Divination professor a good dressing down for tottering about in the state she's in!

The next chapter really has nothing to do with anything at all. But I like throwing in padding chapters at least once in every book. And I think you're all going to like what I put in.

As for Harry's weird unconscious talk with himself... hey, every long Potter fic has to have SOME kind of goofy scene like that, right? I tried keeping it short, though. But it WAS fun having Harry's smartassed mind getting the better of him.

I wrote this whole chapter in one sitting, if you can believe that. I honestly have no idea where all this inspiration to write is coming from, but I'm enjoying it. It's nice to get closer to the end of Prisoner. I REALLY want to write Goblet and Order. Even though everything after Prisoner is gonna be longer as whole and will probably drive me batty, I've got so many things planned for the middle/last set of books that I want to get around to.

Anyway, I've blathered enough. I'll see you when I see you. It may be in a day or two, it may be in a few weeks. I honestly have no idea how long this drive will last, but I'll try and keep times between updates as short as I can, regardless.

Chapter 14 – Pretending

Harry sighed.

"It would've been nice if the twins had given me something more to work with." He said, running a hand back through his hair.

"Well," Tonks began, head tilted, "It'd probably be good to just sit and think of what it *could* be rather than what it *couldn't*. She can't apparate on school grounds. I doubt the house elves are helping her around. She can't be using the hidden passages in the school because someone would notice her entering and leaving..."

"So what does that leave us with?" Harry asked.

"Not much." Solieyu replied. "She's either making her invisible somehow - or using some form of disillusionment charm - or..."

"Or she's found a way to time travel." Luna finished. She was standing outside the Nest's room, leaning on the railing and watching the giant squid trying to catch some birds that were taunting it.

"Time travel?" Harry said. "...There aren't many ways to pull that off."

"You've researched it?" Tonks asked.

Harry smiled. "Yeah, a bit. I wouldn't mind going back and changing the past a bit."

"But if you did that, you would change the future... which means you wouldn't have needed to go back. Which means that you wouldn't really change anything." Luna said.

"...And that's why I only researched it a *bit*." Harry said. "Time travel gives me a headache."

"Well I say we go get some icecream from the kitchens, because I'm out of ideas." Tonks said, sighing.

"Luna, you wouldn't happen to know of any safe methods of time travel, would you?" Asked Harry.

The blonde tilted her head slowly. "Well... my father did a report in the Quibbler about the Ministry secretly using time turners to change the outcome of all major political events in the past fifty years... But Hermione Granger isn't involved in politics..."

Harry stared up at the ceiling, frowning. "No... but she may have a time turner. How do they work? Anyone know?"

"They're supposed to be pretty small." Solieyu said. "I hear all you have to do is turn something on them - hence the name - and off you go."

"I see I'm not the only one who wants to change things in the past." Harry said. He caught Solieyu's eye and jerked his head towards Luna. Solieyu shook his head quickly. Harry nodded once, then continued, "But how would she get ahold of one? It can't be easy, and I doubt the staff would be willing to call in any favors for her."

"Mmm, I dunno about that, Harry." Tonks said. "She's probably the smartest witch in the school. We should check her schedule or something, see how many classes she's got on her plate. If she *is* using a time turner, there's a pretty good chance her schedule will have her in two places at once."

"I'll head off and see if I can find Fred and George, then. I'm sure they'd be able to get ahold of it for us. At the very least, they could try getting Ron to." Harry said, getting up from the couch.

"I'll go and follow Hermione around a bit, see if I can't actually see her disappearing into thin air." Tonks said, also getting to her feet. "Luna, Leon, you two gonna do anything?"

Luna finally turned and around and walked back into the room, looking to Solieyu. "We could always try the direct approach, of course." She said, lazily.

"You'd probably be better off on your own for that one, Luna." Solieyu said. "It'd look suspicious if I was there, too."

"I suppose." Luna said.

"I'll head off to Hagrid's. If Ron and Hermione are visiting to comfort him, I'm sure he must know *something*... He is staff, after all. And he does let things slip when they aren't supposed to." Solieyu said, shrugging.

"Right then. Good luck to you all and we'll meet up here after dinner." Harry said. He opened the trap door up and headed out.

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Later that night, Harry groaned as he flopped down onto the couch in the Nest again. Tonks sat down next to him, stretching her legs out over his lap. Solieyu sat in the chair opposite them and Luna, apparently caring little for causing Solieyu embarrassment, flopped down onto his lap and practically curled up against him. The vampire blushed and refused to look in Harry and Tonks' direction, as they were grinning stupidly at him.

Clearing his throat, Harry said, "Well, did any of you lot manage to round up any useful information?"

"Well," Luna began, "I asked Hermione about it and she said she didn't know what I was talking about. But she seemed rather spooked about something. Perhaps she was being chased by a slithering sneakcat."

"Leon?"

"First, never eat anything Hagrid tries serving to you. Hard as bloody rocks and quite possibly the stickiest things on the planet. Second, I did learn something, actually. I told him that Hermione seemed a bit frazzled lately - I went down after Luna asked her directly, so it wasn't entirely a lie - and asked if he knew why. He said that she's been coming down to his hut to have a good cry every so often. It does seem like she's overworked or something, from what he said. He wouldn't tell me outright, so I'm not sure if he knows the inner workings of what's going on, though."

"Tonks?"

"Nothin'. I decided to tag along with those two. I followed Hermione after Luna asked her about the time turner. She rushed off and, after putting a few of those lovely silencing charms on my shoes, followed after her. I did pretty good for a while. Then Peeves came along." Tonks said, looking cross. "I had to duck into an empty classroom to avoid getting seen by him. I think he got Hermione with a water bomb or something, because there was a splash and a shriek shortly after I gave up the chase. What about you, Harry? Any luck getting her schedule from the twins?"

"It took a few hours, but yeah, I got it." Harry said. "You three might not have gotten much info separately, but it all comes together rather nicely." He reached into his robes and pulled out a piece of parchment. "They copied it over to this for me. Take a look."

Tonks leaned forward to read it, goggling quickly. "Merlin's bits, is she insane?"

Harry held the copied schedule out for Luna and Solieyu to take a look at. Solieyu raised an eyebrow after glancing at the parchment. "Potions and Charms at the same time on Mondays, Defense and Herbology at the same time on Wednesdays... and it goes on like that? Yes, I'd say all that work would be enough to make her need a good cry every so often. The stress is probably getting to her."

"She would have to avoid herself, you know." Luna added. "If she ran into herself, she might go mad."

"I think she's one more class away from 'mad' status, anyway." Tonks said. "Why is that girl not in Ravenclaw with us? Why did we hafta get Terry Boot?"

"I'm just glad he finally got expelled." Harry said. "Hope the little rat gets stuffed in Azkaban for awhile for trying to force himself onto every girl he ran across."

"Normally, I'd say that's a bit harsh, but..." Solieyu began, wrapping an arm around Luna protectively. "I happen to agree in this case."

The room went silent for awhile as the four Ravenclaws thought over what they had learned. Then Tonks blinked and turned to Harry. "Oi,

that reminds me. Ever figure out whether you could trust what that daft old bat said?"

Harry had told his friends about his encounter with Trelawney the previous evening. Tonks had just gaped at him, while Solieyu and Luna thought it might be possible for her to actually have a true vision every blue moon. She had to have been hired for a reason, after all.

"Not a clue." Harry said, shaking his head. "Wish I did, though. I'm trying not to worry about it too much, since Dumbledore said he'd look into it, but... still. There's always gonna be a small part of me worrying about something like that happening. Anyway, I'd rather not spend the evening talking about 'mights' - what are we gonna do about Hermione?"

"I say you confront her, mate." Tonks said, prodding Harry in the shoulder. "She's bound to trust you."

"Why do you say that?" Harry asked.

"Because you're Harry Potter." Replied Solieyu, blandly. "Plus you've saved her a time or two in the past. That's got to count for something. You just have to talk to her like you know, you don't care, and you won't let anyone else find out."

Harry raised an eyebrow and grinned wryly at Solieyu. "What, again? Oh, very well. Tonks, swing your legs down. Apparently, I've been chosen for a mission here."

oOoOoOoOoOoOo

Harry wandered the corridors of Hogwarts, heading towards the library. If Hermione's schedule was as busy as it seemed, she would either be there or the Gryffindor common room. Of course, it would have been easier to do this if he still had possession of the Map. He briefly wondered if, had he been looking for such a thing, he would have spotted two dots marked 'Hermione Granger' on it.

"But I know where I belong..." Harry half sang, half mumbled as he walked along. It had been awhile since he belted out a tune in his horrible, off-key way. As he had nothing better to do en route, he

figured it wouldn't hurt. Sure, he might get weird stares from random students that he passed. But he figured he got weird stares from random students all the time anyway, so who cared if they knew he liked to sing. What harm would it cause if the wizarding world knew that he was tone-deaf? Briefly, a mental image of a resurrected Voldemort coming after him with a radio cranking out glorious, horrible **FUNK** entered his mind and he couldn't help but snort. "Away from your gods... that heal all wounds and light this endless dark..."

He stopped his horrible singing a good ways before he reached the library. Madam Pince was an old buzzard who apparently had the best ears in the school. He had learned early on not to upset the woman if he wanted access to her domain. Quietly slipping into the library, it didn't take long to find his target. She was the only one with almost a dozen books and three long pieces of parchment spread out across a table.

Harry pulled up a chair on the opposite side of hers, sitting and watching the girl, who was oblivious to the fact that he was there. He hadn't seen her in awhile - far too long, apparently - because he didn't remember Hermione looking like this. There were heavy bags under the girl's eyes, her hair was more frazzled than normal, and she seemed to have developed a nervous tick.

"Hermione?" Harry whispered. Hermione jumped and stared up at him, her wide eyes reminding him of Trelawney's.

"Oh! Harry!" She said, her voice quiet as well. "What are you doing here?"

"That isn't healthy, you know." Harry said.

"What?"

"Taking on so much at once. Especially at our age." Harry said.

"I have no idea what you're talking about, Harry, and I'm very busy, so if you could..." Hermione began.

"I know. I don't care. And I won't tell anyone." Harry said, basically repeating what Solieyu suggested he say. "You know you can trust

me. It's not like I'm going to run off and tell Snape that you're using a rare object to be in two places at once. I do commend you for baffling the hell out of Fred and George, though."

"I... I really have no idea--" Hermione began again.

"Hermione." Harry said, looking straight into her eyes. "Even if you don't come out and say it, the writing's on the walls. I'm not a Ravenclaw for nothing, you know. We've run a recon of sorts on you today, you know. Between everything we've learned, it didn't take much to figure it out."

Hermione blinked at him. "Is that why that strange girl with the blonde hair...?"

"Yup. Luna Lovegood. She fancies Leon." Harry said, grinning.

"What?" Hermione said, blinking again. "Really? But she's so... so..."

"Weird? Yeah, she's definitely a bit off-center. S'what makes her *her*, though. Just like you trying to take every class in the school is what makes you *you*, Hermione. How long?" Harry asked.

Hermione bit down on her lower lip, looking around frantically. Whether it was to check for eavesdroppers or to try figuring a way to escape, Harry wasn't sure. When she looked back to him, she quickly said, "Since the beginning of term, only McGonagall knows, she got it, I'm fine, and I've got homework in Potions, Charms, and Transfiguration to get done tonight, so if you'd please just leave me be, I can get them done!"

Harry held up his hands. "Fair enough. Just don't drive yourself insane, Hermione. I've read about people who've done that, you know. Hagrid isn't the only one you can talk to if you need to."

"...Thank you, Harry. I'm sorry I'm being so waspish. It's just..."

"You haven't slept much lately. You're probably either going to Madam Pomfrey for pepper-up potions or you've made a small supply yourself, judging from the nervous tick. It's a side effect of too many of those. Get some sleep tonight, Hermione. That thing can become

permanent if you keep avoiding real rest." Harry said, getting up and returning his chair to its original position. "See you."

Harry left the library, nursing what he was sure was going to be a monstrous headache. He knew Hermione was smart - definitely smarter than he was, anyway - but she sure lacked common sense sometimes. What was she thinking, working herself to death like that?

But Harry was nothing if not truthful. He headed up to the seventh floor, making his way towards Gryffindor Tower. Now he wished that Hermione had been up there, as it would have saved him some walking. The only reason he knew where their common room was located was because Fred and George had happily informed him early on. He had never had any real use for the knowledge - or what the current password was, but he was glad they kept him up to date. He didn't feel like standing around and arguing with a portrait.

"Hello, my good lady!" Harry said, trying to be as cheerful as his aching legs would allow. "I don't suppose I could pop in and talk to the Weasley twins, could I?"

The Fat Lady glanced down at him. "Ahh, and you must be Harry Potter, yes? A shame you didn't make it into Gryffindor. You would look so good in red... In any case, I'm afraid I can't let you in without the password, dear."

"Snakeskin Boots." Harry said, smirking up at the Fat Lady.

"I'm betting *those* two gave it to you, did they?" She asked.

"They did!" Harry replied.

"Oh... very well. Give them a rap on the head for me for doing that, will you?" Asked the Fat Lady as her portrait swung open, revealing the path inward.

"Will do!" Harry said, heading on in.

The Gryffindor common room wasn't much different from the Ravenclaw one, color scheme aside. They lacked the giant couch the Ravenclaw common room had, but in all other aspects, they were

very similar. Every head in the room turned to him as he entered. He cocked an eyebrow and declared, "I have come for the heads of Fred and George Weasley!"

"Someone call our names?" Came a voice from the stairs at the far end of the room. "Ah, Harry! What brings you all the way up here at this hour?"

Fred, followed by George, entered the common room and headed for Harry, who was trying not to chuckle at the baffled looks on the faces of the other Gryffindors. Once the twins got to him, they seemed to notice the silence as well. "Alright, you lot, back to what you were doing! Nothing to see here!"

Once people had determined that nothing spectacular would be happening just because Harry was there, they did indeed return to whatever they had been doing prior to his arrival. Once the common room was noisy again, Harry fulfilled his promise to the Fat Lady and promptly whacked each twin on the head. When they protested, he hiked a thumb in the portrait's general direction and simply said, "She made me do it!"

"Should we assume this has something to do with one Hermione Granger?" Asked George.

"You should." Harry said, nodding once.

"And should we assume this means you've found out how she's been so tricksy?" Asked Fred.

"You should." Harry repeated.

"And should we assume you're going to tell us?" They asked in unison.

"Not a chance!" Harry said, smiling pleasantly.

The twins nearly fell over.

"Why not?" Fred asked.

"Made a promise to her. Sorry, lads. I know I can trust the two of you, but I think it's best we left this one alone. I do have a request, though..." Harry began.

"Swipe her pepper-up potion?" George asked.

"How did you...?"

"Come now, Harry," George began, grinning slightly. "We're actually pretty good with potions, believe it or not."

"We just fool around in Snape's class to irritate him." Fred added.

"Yeah. We know the obvious side-effects of things when we see them. We'll go hijack the stuff as soon as you take off." George finished.

"Thanks, guys. Sorry I couldn't fork over any useful information. I think she's alright, lack of sleep aside. If she got herself a decent night's sleep, it'd probably do her a world of good. Think you two could replace a bit of her pepper-up potion with a dreamless sleep potion or something? Just enough for one dose, and just enough for a regular night's sleep. Don't want to overdo it. She's gonna be mad enough at us as is." Harry said.

"Sure thing. We've got a hidden supply of potions in our trunks. Useful for experimenting on new items!" Fred said, grinning.

"One of these days, we're going to open ourselves up a joke shop. Put ol' Zonko out of business." George said.

"And a fine addition such a place would make to our world." Harry said in a snobbish voice. "I take it you're going to use at least a couple of ideas from The List in your item research?"

"Indeed we are!" Fred exclaimed. "Ahh, only a couple years left here, then we can set out and make a name for ourselves *outside* of Hogwarts."

"Your legacy will live on through the products you sell to the students?" Harry asked, smirking.

"Too right it will." George said.

"Oi. Anyway, I'm a bit tired from wandering all over the place. I'm gonna head up to *my* tower and rest."

"Your tower? Being a bit cocky there, aren't you?"

"Ahh, but it *is* my tower. I found it, after all." Harry said, cryptically.

Fred and George looked at each other.

"You know..." One began.

"I don't think..."

"...Harry is talking about Ravenclaw Tower."

"Indeed I'm not. Good evening to you, lads!" Harry said, bowing with a flourish before quickly leaving Gryffindor Tower. He knew the twins would probably give chase, and he wanted a good head start on them. He didn't really care if they found out about the Nest, as they would probably find a way to put up mini-wards on the place to keep anyone that wasn't a Ravenclaw out of it. But that was entirely beside the point.

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When Harry opened the trap door and walked back into the Nest, he was panting heavily and about to drop. The chair was nearest the entrance, so he fell down onto it with a groan.

"What're you outta breath for, eh?" Asked Tonks, who was stretched out on the couch. She seemed to be the only one left in the tower. "Don't tell me Hermione went berserk and chased after you, hurling library books."

"Nah..." Harry said, trying to catch his breath. He also had a nasty cramp in his side. "Twins were after me."

"The twins? Why?"

"Because I found out what was up with Hermione and promised not to tell anyone. Plus when I said I was going to 'my' tower rather than 'Ravenclaw' Tower, they got all curious and decided to pursue me the entire way back. They didn't see me enter, though." Harry said, grinning.

"Was it a time turner, then?" Tonks asked.

"Yup." Harry said. "And she's hitting the pepper-up potions pretty hard."

"Ooh, ouch." Tonks said. "...I thought you promised not to tell anyone."

"You, Leon, and Luna don't count since we worked it out together." Harry said. "Oi, budge over, the couch is comfier than this chair is."

Tonks rolled her eyes, but sat up anyway, letting Harry flop down next to her.

"So what've you been upto and where is the other half of our quartet?" Harry asked, leaning his head on the back of the couch and closing his eyes.

"Leon and Luna decided to head back to the Tower about a half hour ago. I figured you'd probably come here first, so I decided to wait." Tonks said.

"Yeah, you just wanted to be alone with me again, I bet." Harry teased.

"And what if I did? You know, we should rig up something on the invisible wall that tells us when someone's coming up." Tonks said.

"Oh? And what might you want to be so paranoid about?" Harry asked, cracking open an eye and glancing aside at her.

Tonks blushed, swatting Harry on the arm. "I just don't want to be caught on the floor in a ... in a near kiss again."

"Would you rather be caught in an *actual* kiss, then?" Harry asked.

"Quiet, you." Tonks muttered. "You know what I meant."

"Indeed I did. But I'm rather enjoying teasing you like this." Harry said.

"You're impossible, you know that?"

"Quite!"

Tonks rolled her eyes again, leaning up against Harry's side and closing her eyes as well. When she let out a big yawn, Harry said, "You should get back to Ravenclaw Tower too. Wouldn't do you good to fall asleep up here. You'll be late to classes tomorrow."

"Meh, Binns won't notice me gone and I won't miss hearing more about goblin rebellions." Tonks mumbled.

"True, true. But your back will probably hate you if you fell asleep sitting up." Harry said.

Tonks let out a 'hmm' then nodded slowly. "I suppose you're right. Here, scoot down to the left end of the couch, will ya?"

Harry blinked and did so. Seconds later, Tonks' head was resting on one of his legs, her eyes closed and a smile on her face. "There!" She said. "Now I'm not sitting up!"

"Oi! When did I volunteer for pillow duty?" Harry asked, glaring down at the girl.

"You brought it on yourself, I'm afraid." Tonks said. "You aren't allowed to complain."

Harry scowled, but went silent again, content on simply watching as Tonks clearly drifted off to sleep. He smiled down at her and muttered, "Crazy wench." He knew his back - and his neck, probably - were going to hate him come morning. But he didn't think it mattered much. It was a fair trade for getting to watch Tonks sleep. She looked... very peaceful. More peaceful than he would ever look, he figured. He had a tendency of having weird nightmares.

His mind started wandering, drifting back to when he had had a conversation with himself while he was recovering. Without really thinking about it, he brought a hand up and ran his fingers through Tonks' currently soft-brown hair. '*You can't fall out of love with someone, huh?*' He thought, sighing quietly.

He supposed it was only natural. She *did* save him from his daily hell. And, while the Dursleys were still mean to him, they knew better than to try and do anything to him. It was a shame they weren't around when he had nearly killed his Aunt Marge. Though, he figured, they would all have probably been Obliviated. Harry entertained the thought of sending a mind-addled Lockhart after them to do the job.

"Some hero I am." He mumbled into the silence. "Can't even get up the courage to confess. Guess I don't want anything to change..."

It was true, in a way. It was the first year some form of Voldemort wasn't out to kill him. Sirius Black was out there somewhere, the Dementors were on the grounds, and there were a few minor things inside the castle walls that had to be dealt with... but in comparison to his first two years, he was having a peaceful time of it. It was the happiest he had ever been. A happiness that had only grown when he had managed to form his Patronus into something with a shape. He could keep the Dementors away... and he was confident he could do so long enough for Tonks and her mother to escape if need be. The fear of his happy memory being taken away gone, he was simply left with the memory itself. The day he had met Tonks had been the source of power behind his Patronus, but now he was wondering if he had chosen the right thing.

After all, the first time they had kissed - even if it was a spur of the moment, one-sided, and very quick thing - was something he would never forget. Fate might have hated Harry, but it couldn't take away the surge of emotions he felt when he was around Tonks. With a sigh, he gazed down at Tonks' sleeping face and smiled sadly. "I do love you." He murmured. "I just wish I could say that when you're awake... You'll have to wait a bit longer, I guess."

Harry leaned his head on the back of the couch once more, letting his eyes slip shut. He had faced down danger more times than he'd like

to admit to and his biggest problem was telling his best friend that he was in love with her?

A groan escaped Harry's lips. He knew he wasn't going to be able to sleep in such an awkward position. Which meant he was going to be left with his thoughts, all of which were focused on the sleeping girl that was using his leg as a pillow.

It was going to be a long, long night.

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Author's Notes: I think my steam is starting to run out. This took a bit longer than expected to write. Still, it's another chapter, right? And now we've gotten two major things taken care of. One, Harry knows Hermione has a time turner. And two, Harry's finally admitted to himself that he really is in love.

This is the calm before the storm, folks. If I actually stick to my writer's guide - and I'm actually doing a good job considering the new one has been for 10 through 19 - I've got five chapters left. In the coming chapters, we're going to have Sirius make his move, Lupin shift into werewolf form, find out what form Harry's Patronus takes on, and what's going to happen to Harry over the summer! Good stuff. And, like I've said, I have a fun way of starting book 4 up.

And yeah, I know it was a bit silly to have the Quidditch fight going on. But it was fun to write and I figure that by the time Harry and Malfoy were actually low enough for anyone to really notice - Madam Hooch was probably just trying to keep track of the Slytherins playing the other positions - Harry had already slung the Bolt Thrower and was making an attempt in not plowing into the ground. And Malfoy was chasing the snitch shortly after, so he avoided a painful attack easily enough. I figure that anything Hooch found out AFTER the event was too late. In any case, it's said and done and, with any luck, I won't be writing any more Quidditch-related material for a good, long time.

So the update-o-rama continues and you lot get another chapter this week! I think I SHOULD blame the HIM music I got ahold of. I've got a playlist of nothing but their songs and it's well over 3 hours long. It usually takes me 1 to 2 hours to type up a chapter of decent length,

and the music helps drive me forward. Until next time, folks, whenever that might be!

Chapter 15 – Confusion and Chaos

Tonks yawned quietly, stretching out. She had slept surprisingly well that night, though her neck was kind of sore. She frowned at that and reached up to rub at it a bit when her hand smacked into something. Opening her eyes slightly, she looked up to see Harry sitting with his head craned back, leaning it on the back of the couch.

"Ooh, he's gonna be mad..." Muttered the girl as she sat up.

"No. Just sore. And kinda tired. And I think my right leg's been asleep for a few hours." Harry mumbled, his head tilting to one side with a loud **POP**. "Sleep well, Nymmy?"

"Gah! You're awake?" Tonks said.

"Never went to sleep." Harry admitted, smiling wearily at her. He had bags under his eyes and every time he blinked, she could see just how purple his eyelids had become.

"I didn't actually mean to fall asleep..." Tonks said. "I just kinda... drifted off."

"S'no problem. Long as nothing bad happens today, I'll be alright." Harry said, holding off a yawn until he finished speaking. "Our agenda for next year is to find a better secret tower. One large enough to actually have rooms or something. At least enough space for a bed..."

"Sounds like fun." Tonks agreed, grinning. "Now why don't you lay down and get a couple hours' rest?"

"Nah, I'll be alright. If it gets too bad, I can just ask the twins to spot me some of Hermione's pepper-up potion. Wonder if she's up yet." Harry wondered aloud.

"Dunno. Let's go down for some breakfast and see if they're covered in bruises!" Tonks suggested, getting to her feet and stretching.

"Ah, works for me." Harry said, languidly rising as well. "Mmph... just uh... gimme a minute. I don't wanna be putting weight on my right leg when it goes waking up."

"I'll meetcha down there, then. I'm *hungry*." Tonks said, patting her stomach.

"You're always hungry." Harry pointed out.

"And yet I still keep my girlishly good figure." Tonks said, striking a goofy pose for a few seconds. "Thanks for letting me sleep, though. Really. It was sweet of you..."

"That's me. Mr. Nice Guy." Harry said, stifling another yawn and abruptly shifting his weight to his left leg. "Augh, damn... there it goes."

"Pins and needles?"

"Yup."

"Ouch. Hope it passes quick. Seeya in the Great Hall!" Tonks said, bounding over and kissing Harry on the cheek before heading out the trap door. As she left, he heard her call out, "IF you make it down in time to eat!"

Harry grinned lazily as she left. He knew he had blushed. He always blushed when she randomly kissed him, it seemed. He had spent most of the night pondering his life, how he had gotten to where he was, and what he was going to be doing in the future. He hadn't yet decided what job path he would take in the future, though... it was still a bit too soon to worry about that. If he made it to his fifth year at Hogwarts, *then* he would think about it.

The blood magic be damned, Harry was going to find a way out of spending *any* time with the Dursleys that summer, too. He didn't care how he escaped so long as he was able to. In addition, whatever he came up with, he was hoping he could coax Tonks into joining him. He didn't really want to spend the entire summer holiday on his own, after all. And, if he was being perfectly honest with himself, he wouldn't mind if Tonks just so happened to fall asleep on him again.

He also wondered if Tonks knew her hair color tended to shift between its natural state and that which she fell asleep using. Harry had watched it slowly turn from black to blonde and back again. It was cute, if a little weird.

Shaking his right leg out a few times to make sure it was awake again, he headed for the trap door, limping slightly. "Dammit, leg's not gonna work right all day, I can just tell..."

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As soon as Harry entered the Great Hall, he was clocked on either side of the head. Hard.

"**OWW!** Who the h-- oh, jeez, what happened to *you* guys?" Harry said, staring.

Fred and George Weasley stood before him, looking severely irritated. Both had green skin for some reason, antennae sprouting from their heads, and tails.

"Hermione Granger happened to us." They said in unison, turning to glare at the bushy-haired girl who was sitting at the Gryffindor table and eating a proper breakfast for what seemed to be the first time.

"You should have seen it." George said, scowling. "She stormed downstairs in her night clothes, stalked over to us, and poof - here we are. We can't figure out what she *did*, either!"

"Obviously, she thought of you two as some form of space invaders." Harry said, scanning the two. "Well, look at it this way, guys - it was for a good cause. She looks like she's eating properly, yeah? And she certainly looked healthier than she did the other night."

"Speaking of sleeping, word's goin' around that you were off sleeping somewhere." Fred said, grinning slowly.

"And word's goin' around that you weren't alone." George continued.

"What?" Harry said, glancing over to Tonks, who glared back at him. "Oh, dammit. I told you - I was going to my tower. Tonks just happened to be there. Used my right leg as a blasted pillow, too."

"That why you seem to be limping?" George asked.

"More or less." Harry said, bypassing the twins and heading for the Ravenclaw table. He knew that there was one of two ways he could get around this. One, he could ignore the whispers and stares. Two, he could get smacked by Tonks. So he picked the only obvious choice - the third.

Sitting down, Harry promptly kissed Tonks on the cheek, grinned in a sleepy way, and said, "Looks like I made it after all, huh?"

Tonks lit up like a Christmas tree, the twins cracked up, and Harry casually turned to load food onto his plate. The way he saw it, if people wanted to talk and spread rumors, they should at least spread true ones. He didn't care if anyone spread the rumor that he and Tonks were an item. He was tired of letting the students' talking get to him.

He did care about his left arm not getting broken again, though, which seemed like it might actually happen if Tonks connected with the massively telegraphed punch she was currently winding up. Just like sugar affected Harry's magic flow, sleep deprivation seemed to affect his judgement in that it threw it out the window in favor of on-the-spot decisions. It also seemed to make him more aware of his surroundings than he normally would have been.

When Tonks threw the punch, Harry leaned as far backward as he could without falling off backwards. Tonks faltered and fell forward. Harry pushed himself forward off of whoever was sitting behind him at the next table (with an ignored, indignant cry of "Hey!") and caught Tonks before she could collide with either the bench or the top of the table. She landed in his arms at a weird angle, having thrown the punch with her left hand, and thusly ended up staring up at his crooked smile.

"Lo, Nymmy." He murmured.

Tonks blushed again. "If you're gonna act like this every time I fall asleep on you, I'm not getting anywhere near you at night! You're *weird* when you haven't slept."

Feeling rather restless, Fred just happened to choose that moment to pipe up. "Oooh, you hear that, brother o' mine? Not only did they apparently spend the night together, but they didn't seem to get any *sleep*!"

"Can't imagine why, Fred m'boy. Unless..." George began, dragging the last word out as much as he could.

"Do you two wanna end up in worse shape than you already are?" Tonks spat, tilting her head back to get a look at them.

"Certainly not, my dear Tonks!" Fred said, grinning.

"We do, however, want you to be embarrassed as we were!" George added, slapping his brother jovially on the back. "And now that we've given the rumor mill added fuel, we shall go and eat!"

Harry helped Tonks sit back up properly as the redheads left for the Gryffindor table. She glared at him and muttered, "Honestly, what are you thinking today?"

"Not much. I thought myself out overnight." Harry said, being quite truthful. "Runnin' on pure steam now, I think."

"I should see about drugging your goblet with dreamless sleep potion at dinner." Tonks muttered. There was still a faint blush on her cheeks. "Aren't you worried about what people are gonna say now?"

"I don't care what anyone else says." Harry said. "Besides, what's so bad about me kissing you on the cheek in public?"

"Wha... nothing, but... oh, dammit, just eat." Tonks said, scowling again as she faced her own plate of breakfast.

Harry chuckled. He resumed piling food onto his plate. Having not slept, his body had started getting hungrier than normal sometime around 3 in the morning. How fast he wolfed the food down proved

that, though he did choke at one point, prompting Tonks to slap him on the back a few times.

"What've we got today, again?" He asked as they left the Great Hall later on.

"Defense and then Charms later this afternoon. You should probably take a nap after Defense Against the Dark Arts, y'know." Tonks said.

"Probably." Harry admitted. "As amusing as it was to see you all red like that, I'm not sure I can get by on no sleep."

"I *will* figure out a way to get back at you for that, y'know." Tonks said.

"Oh, c'mon, Nymmy. Don't be a spoilsport about it. They were gonna talk about us one way or another. Might as well have some fun with it." Harry said.

"You seem to be doing that a lot lately." Came a voice from behind them. They turned to see a rather irritable-looking Hermione Granger standing there, tapping a foot.

"Good morning, Hermione. Sleep well?" Harry asked, another lazy grin on his face.

"Oh, I should say so. And now I'm four hours behind on my work thanks to that little stunt you and the twins pulled. Give me one good reason I shouldn't make you look like *those* two do." Hermione said.

"Because you're feeling better than you have in months, have the energy to make it to the end of the year, aren't about to go insane, and because I'm the lovable hero who can do no wrong?" Harry suggested.

Tonks snorted from beside him.

"...Oh, alright. I'll agree to everything but that last one." Hermione said. "...And I guess I should be happy that someone's concerned about me enough to do something like that. But still! It was a very sneaky thing to do!"

"And I'm sorry for doing it." Harry said, inclining his head slightly. "But you were gonna work yourself crazy if you kept at that pace. S'amazing what good a little sleep'll do you. You saw how I was actin' in the Great Hall. You were kinda like that, only you obsessed with schoolwork rather than trying to make a friend all bright red."

Tonks slugged him in the arm.

"So what *really* happened last night? It'd be nice knowing the truth." Hermione said, raising an eyebrow.

"We have a little tower of our own." Harry said, shrugging. "It's a tiny little thing, though. Managed to fit a small chair and couch there. I was sitting on the couch, and Nymmy here thought it'd be funny to use my right leg as a pillow. She was out like a light all night. Meanwhile, my leg was goin' to sleep and I wasn't."

"Ooh, that doesn't sound good." Hermione said, raising the other eyebrow.

"Yeah. My leg wasn't happy when it woke up. Anyway, we still need to head up to our dorms to grab our homework and stuff, so we'd better get goin'. Glad you're feelin' normal again, Hermione!" Harry said, grinning as he and Tonks took off up the main stairs.

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"No, dammit!"

"Come on, Harry. What could it hurt?"

"NO, dammit!"

"She has a point, you know. We might be able to--"

"What part of 'no, dammit' aren't you two getting?"

Harry scowled from his chair over at the other two on the couch. Ever since lunch, they had been trying to convince him to go down and see Hagrid. They were convinced that they might be able to cheer him up if he came along. Harry saw no point in this, however. For one thing,

he wasn't a part of the man's class anymore. He didn't *like* the man, for another. What possible reason could he ever have for going to try cheering him up.

"But Harry, he *likes* you. I know you don't like him, but..." Tonks began again.

"Absolutely not. I'm having a relatively good day. I'm not botching it by going to have him blubber all over me. That mindless idiot brought me to the Dursleys!" Harry spat.

"Under Dumbledore's orders." Solieyu pointed out.

"Have you seen him around Dumbledore?" Harry asked. "He's like a lost puppy around him. He'd go drown himself in the bloody lake if Dumbledore suggested it to him! I am *not* going down to see him!"

"Oh yes you will, Harry Potter, or I'll ignore you for the rest of the year." Tonks stated, crossing her arms and sending Harry a *LOOK*.

Harry glared back. "You wouldn't dare."

"Oh wouldn't I? Would you care to see?"

"And just what, praytell, made *you* two suddenly so concerned for him, eh?"

"**YOU** wouldn't notice because **YOU** left his class. But he's gotten practically impossible to deal with! He'll break down in class, wander off to see Buckbeak, and completely forget to teach!" Tonks cried. "I am *not* going to get a failing mark because *he* can't keep it together."

"So you *don't* care about him, but you *do* care about your grade. How positively Slytherin of you, Nymmy." Harry commented.

Tonks glared. "Fine then. *we'll* be going down to see him, then. You can stay in here and pout forever about how Hagrid brought you to the Dursleys. Since you refuse to grow up, you can 'stay in your room,' so to speak."

"Don't you dare call me immature!" Harry hissed. Tonks and Solieyu jumped.

"Don't do that..." Tonks whispered, a shiver running up her spine.

"Don't do *what?*" Harry asked, scowling.

"Speak in Parseltongue." Solieyu said.

"What? I didn't speak in Parseltongue." Harry said. "Don't be stupid."

"No, you *did*." Tonks said. "It was... it was really creepy..."

"Well if I did, I wasn't aware of it." Harry muttered. "Not like I can practice or anything."

"You say that like you're disappointed." Solieyu said, noticing the odd tone of Harry's voice.

Harry shrugged. "So what if I am? I don't like being able to do something and not have the ability to actively practice and perfect it.

"We could ask Hagrid if he has any snakes he can give you." Tonks suggested hopefully.

Harry sighed, glancing up at her. "You're not gonna give up, are you?"

"Nope!" Responded Tonks, cheerfully. "We were gonna stun you and float you down to see him if you didn't agree."

"Oi!"

"It's true." Solieyu said, a slight smile on his face.

"Harry Potter, the Boy Who Hovered." Tonks said, looking thoughtful momentarily. "...Nahhh, that's no good."

"I hate you both." Harry scowled.

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"Are you *sure* about this?" Harry asked for possibly the tenth time.

"If you don't stop asking that, I'm gonna hex your mouth closed." Tonks said. "Now go on - knock!"

"...Oh, very well." Harry said, rubbing at the bridge of his nose. "I wouldn't be down here if I had gotten sleep. I would've figured out *some* way to get out of it."

"Well aware of that, mate, now *KNOCK*." Tonks said, giving Harry a pointed look.

Sighing, Harry reached out and rapped on the door to Hagrid's hut. From inside, Fang began barking. Moments later, the large man answered the door. His hair was even more messy than normal, his eyes were red and puffy, and he looked quite a bit as if he had dressed in the dark.

"'Arry?" He said, staring down at the boy.

"Uh... hullo, Hagrid." Harry said, unsure of exactly how to begin. It was bad enough he was bone tired, but to try and keep his tone light and talk all friendly-like? That was going to take some effort.

"What're you three doin' down 'ere?" Asked Hagrid, glancing at the Ravenclaws slowly.

"We just thought you could use some company." Tonks said, smiling. "How're you doing, Hagrid?"

"I'm... I'm alright." Hagrid said. "Come in, come in..."

The trio entered the hut, Hagrid closing the door behind them. Harry shuddered. It felt as if he was being trapped. It was a good thing he had lived in a cupboard for the better part of his life, else claustrophobia might set in. And that wouldn't be good at all.

Feeling Tonks nudge him in the side, Harry cleared his throat and looked over at Hagrid, who had put on a pot of tea. "Uh... so... Tonks and Leon tell me things aren't going so well. Have... have Ron and Hermione...?"

Hagrid let out a large snuffle, bowing his head. "No' yet... though they're still tryin, bless 'em..."

"Why can't you just set Buckbeak free?" Harry asked.

"Obvious, innit?" Hagrid said. "Hippogriffs're rare... wouldn't be hardta find 'im..."

"Oh... I... uh, I wish I could do something to help, Hagrid." Harry said, still feeling uneasy.

"Oh, now don' you worry 'bout it." Hagrid said, waving a large, dismissive hand. "S'bad enough tha' Ron and Hermione're spendin' so much time on it. It's my problem, after all."

"Yeah, but..."

"Hagrid?" Tonks interjected, seeing the conversation wasn't going anywhere. "You wouldn't happen to have any snakes, do you?"

"Eh? Snakes? What'd ya need a snake for?" Hagrid asked, looking at the girl.

"Harry accidentally spoke a bit of Parseltongue earlier. It's bothering him that he can't practice speaking it so it doesn't just randomly come out." Tonks said. "We were by ourselves when it happened, but it probably wouldn't be good for him to just yell in Parseltongue in front of other students."

"Mus' be right nice, bein' able to talk to snakes..." Hagrid said, only hearing part of what Tonks had said.

"Wouldn't know." Harry said. "Haven't had much chance to. The last snake I saw was more interested in trying to eat me than it was in chatting it up."

Hagrid pulled the pot away from the fire and poured the Ravenclaws some tea. "Well," He began, "I'm sure I can find somethin' for ya. All sortsa snakes live in the forest, see."

"Do they?"

"Yep. Come from all over the place. Snakes're drawn to magic. Not sure why, exactly. Anyway, I'll... I'll take a look around for ya if ya want." Hagrid said.

"Uh... sure. But um... if you do, could you make sure the snake is small? I don't think I'd be able to tote around a python with me or anything..." Harry said, taking his cup of tea and eyeballing it wearily.

"Sure thing..." Hagrid said, sitting at the table and staring down at his cup of tea as well.

Silence filled the hut after that. Harry was too busy trying to figure out a way not to have to drink the tea, Hagrid was just staring off into space sullenly, and both Tonks and Solieyu were trying to figure out a way to strike up another conversation. After awhile, Tonks had noticed an odd look on Harry's face. She knew that look all too well - it was the one he got when he was working out a difficult problem.

Harry slowly grinned, causing Tonks to clap excitedly. This, in turn, made Hagrid jump and blink at the trio. "Eh? What's goin' on?" He asked.

"I think I know how we can save Buckbeak." Harry said, looking up at Hagrid. "But it's going to be difficult and, uh... I don't think I can tell you what it is. No offense, but the best thing you can do is act like I'm *not* doing anything. This is gonna take all the luck I have, anyway..."

"Really?" Hagrid asked, hope shining in his eyes. "You really think you can save Beaky?"

Harry nodded, smirking. "I'm not a Ravenclaw for nothing. Hagrid, what time is Buckbeak's execution set for?"

"A week from now." Hagrid said, shoulders slumping.

"That should be just about all the time I need to get things set up. Don't worry, Hagrid. I won't let Buckbeak die. It tried to kill Malfoy - that deserves a favor, if you ask me." Harry said.

Half an hour later, when the trio bid Hagrid goodbye, Tonks turned to Harry and asked, "Now what kinda plan didja think of?"

"Hermione." Harry said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

"Hermione? But why... Ohhh. Wait, how's her time turner going to help?" Tonks asked, baffled again.

"That's what I'm gonna need to hammer out in the next week." Harry said. "Don't worry. Everything will turn out fine."

"How do you know?"

Rolling his eyes, Harry explained, "I'm the hero. Everything always works out for the hero."

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The next week passed by rather quickly. Harry, when he had free time, would hole himself up in the Nest and sit outside the room, staring through the railing out at the grounds, lost in thought. He was deeper in thought than Tonks had seen him in in ages, because he seldomly responded if she or Solieyu tried speaking to him. And when he did, he would either just murmur something or nod, not really hearing what was being said.

When he entered the Great Hall the day of Buckbeak's execution, he had a triumphant gleam in his eyes. He had spent the entire night up in the Nest by himself. When he sat down, Tonks asked him what his plan was. But he just smiled and shook his head. "I'll explain later. It's gonna happen this evening. S'all I can say for now. I can't let too much out here."

Tonks just nodded, wondering what Harry could have possibly figured out. The rest of the day was spent in an odd sort of silence. Harry was working over the details of his plan, trying to ensure that he had covered for every possible think that could go wrong. When the sun was low in the sky, Harry, Tonks and Solieyu headed off to find Hermione.

"Alright, wonder boy." Tonks said, swatting Harry lightly. "What's this amazing plot of yours to save Buckbeak?"

"You'll see." Harry said. As they rounded a corner, they just so happened to run into the twins - literally, in fact. "Oomph!"

"Well well!" Said Fred.

"Look who we bumped into!" George said.

"Hey guys. Look, do either of you know where Hermione is? I've worked out how to save Hagrid's hippogriff, but I'm gonna need her help." Harry said.

"Would this '*help*' involve however she's sneaking about?" Asked Fred.

"It would." Harry said. "And no, I still can't explain that to you. You'll have to ask her yourselves."

The twins exchanged a sour look before George nodded. "Yeah, she and Ron were heading down to see Hagrid, actually. Don't think they worked out a way to save Buckbeak legally."

"Quite alright. My way not be legal, *per se*, but it's perfectly crafty and, providing we get Hermione's help, has no chance of failing." Harry said, smirking. "We'll need to run to get to them before they get to him, though. See you guys later! Thanks!"

Fred and George watched the Ravenclaws run off down the hall. Once they had rounded a corner, Fred turned to George and asked, "Nothing ever has zero chance of failure. Think they'll need our help?"

"I think it wouldn't hurt to get some distractions ready in case they're needed." George said.

Nodding, Fred replied, "Then let's go load up. If nothing else, we can turn everyone's attention away from Harry's lot. Wonder where Peeves is..."

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Pushing open the front doors of the school, Harry's group rushed outside. However, they didn't need to worry about reaching Hermione and Ron before they got to Hagrid's. They were standing roughly halfway between the school and his hut, apparently having some kind of wild argument.

"Hermione!" Harry called out as they approached. "Oi! Hermione!"

Ron and Hermione were startled out of their row, turning and looking at the Ravenclaws as they approached. "Harry?" Hermione said, frowning. "What are you doing out here?"

"Looking for you." Harry panted. "Look... I know how to save Buckbeak..."

"What? How?" Ron asked. "We must've searched every bloody book in the library. Felt like it, anyway." He muttered, glaring aside.

Rolling her eyes, Hermione asked, "So what do you have planned?"

"It's simple. But... we're going to need some *help*." Harry said, giving Hermione a pointed look.

"Some help? But... ...oh, Harry, no. I can't!" Hermione replied, looking just shy of horrified. "It would be breaking about a dozen school rules!"

"It would also help save a life." Solieyu pointed out.

"Oi, what're you lot talking about?" Ron asked.

"Absolutely nothing." Harry said, quickly. "Please, Hermione! Just think of how... and I can't believe *I'm* saying this... happy you'll make Hagrid."

"Please, Hermione?" Tonks asked. "All of us are going to fail in addition to everything else if we don't. You've seen how spaced out he's been lately. He couldn't teach anything to anyone in that state."

"Yes, but..." Hermione began, biting at her lower lip. She turned to look towards Hagrid's hut... and promptly let out a shriek. Everyone

else jerked their heads in the direction she was looking. And then they saw it too. A large, black dog was standing, wild-eyed, nearby, staring down at them.

"Th...that's..." Ron because.

"A grim?" Solieyu suggested.

Ron nodded slowly.

"A what?" Harry asked.

"Biiiig doggie." Tonks said. "Um... let's run, shall we?"

But the only one running was the dog, who charged at the group of students. Everyone cried out, each leaping in a different direction. Harry and Solieyu had their wands out as they landed, firing spells at the large dog, who swiftly dodged them. It soon became very clear that the dog was going for Ron, who had put the least amount of distance between himself and the charging mongrel.

"Ron!" Hermione cried. "Look out!"

Ron scrambled to pull his wand. But just when he got it out, he was pounced to the ground, his head bouncing when it hit the earth. This gave the dog enough time to leap off of his body and clamp down on his right leg. He let out a shrill cry of pain. The four remaining students all had their wands trained on the dog now, but it looked up at each of them, snarling around Ron's leg as if to warn them not to strike.

Far swifter than should have been possible, the dog began dragging Ron off in the direction of the Whomping Willow, which Hermione was the first to notice. They all followed after the dog, who dropped Ron just long enough to rush the tree. It seemed to do something in the back before it rushed back out, grabbed hold of Ron again, and dragged him into a hole that had opened up between the tree's roots.

"He's escaping! We've got to do something!" Hermione said, bouncing nervously on her heels.

"We can't do anything! You saw that look it gave us! It'd probably rip his leg off if we tried shooting at it!" Harry said.

"How the *hell* did it stop the Willow?" Tonks asked.

"What?" Harry said, lifting his head to stare at the tree. Indeed, it had gone completely still. "...Good question. It had to have done something when it let Ron go. I know where the passage goes, I think, so that's nothing to worry about. But we do need to get in there before the tree springs back to life."

Harry led the way as the four remaining students rushed for the hole in the ground. But just as they reached it, one of the Willow's lower branches made a threatening, low swing.

"Damn!" Harry swore, skidding to a halt too late. The branch sliced open the robes on his right arm. "No, don't worry about me! It just scratched me! Come on! We need to swing around back! Gotta figure out what the hell that dog did to stop it!"

The ground made a wide arc around the tree, being sure to keep well out of its reach. "Okay," Solieyu said, scanning the back of the tree's trunk. "The dog struck it...somewhere around here..." He shot a harmless, blue beam of light at the trunk. "Any ideas?"

"Good eyes." Harry commented briefly before sighing. "Not a one. Leon, anything look out of place?"

"I have no idea. I told you - I'm awful with Herbology." Solieyu said, shrugging. "And I don't readily see anything out of the ordinary."

Just then, something small and grey flew past the boys' heads, causing them to jump. Tonks and Hermione, seemingly frustrated, had started hucking rocks at the Willow.

"Oi! That *isn't* going to--" Harry began. But before he could finish, Hermione had made an impressive throw. The rock struck the tree, stripping some of its bark away. It also caused the Willow to freeze up as it moved to begin blocking shots.

"...help." Harry finished lamely. "Come on, let's get in there before it wakes up again!"

The four rushed back around to the front where, sure enough, the hole in the roots had opened. They quickly scampered down into it, Harry using Lumos to give them some light. The tunnel was just barely big enough for them and it was so long that they couldn't see the other end.

"You said you knew where this led?" Hermione said as they started walking. "What did you mean?"

"Got a special Map from the twins." Harry said. "Lets me see where everyone is in the castle at any given time. Also shows paths leading away from Hogwarts grounds. This was one of the few left intact, but as it was under the Willow, it wasn't exactly a viable option. Interesting that you can freeze the tree... but it's still too out in the open to be of any use."

"Harry's been escaping to Hogsmeade to satisfy his sweet tooth." Tonks said, grinning aside to Hermione.

"You shouldn't be doing that!" Hermione said, glaring at Harry.

"Shouldn't be, but I am." Harry said. "Get quiet, you lot. The exit's up ahead. Look!"

A faint square of light was in the distance. Harry turned to Tonks and murmured, "Think you can cast some charms to make us all silent? I'd do it myself, but someone has to hold the torch, so to speak."

"Sure thing!" Tonks said, aiming at everyone's feet and casting a pair of quick spells. "There we go. Though I dunno how well it'll work when the thing we don't want hearing us has enhanced hearing."

"Don't worry." Solieyu murmured as they resumed walking. "If I can't hear anything, it won't be able to."

Hermione frowned at him. "What do you mean by that?"

"Leon's got good ears, that's all." Tonks said, quickly.

"Oh..." Hermione said. But she didn't quite look convinced.

"Alright. We're going to have to be careful here." Harry whispered as they got to the end of the tunnel. "Everyone get their wands up and ready to stun. First priority is to find Ron. I still think he's a right arse, but I'm not gonna let him die. If we can get in and out of here without running into the dog, we'll be doing good. After we rescue him, one of you is going to need to levitate him back through the tunnel. Chances are that his leg's good and broken right now. One of you is going to need to light the way. Whoever's left joins me in watching our backs. If worse comes to worse, we'll stay and fight while the rest escape with Ron and go for a teacher. Got it?"

"Lead the way, O Hero." Tonks said, winking at Harry.

Rolling his eyes, Harry ran forward and through the door at the end of the tunnel. Solieyu was right behind him, whispering near Harry's ear, "I can smell Ron's blood. He's got to be somewhere around the far end of the hall."

Harry nodded and the two led the way up the broken-down old hallway. From behind them, Hermione whispered in awe, "We're in the Shrieking Shack..."

When they reached the door at the far end, which was cracked just slightly, Solieyu stepped forward. A moment later and he nodded back at the others. Harry took a deep breath, then launched forward, throwing the door open and quickly scanning the room. No one but Ron was in it. The four quickly hurried over to him, where he sat up against the far wall, looking extremely pained.

"It's broken alright." Solieyu said, kneeling next to the boy. "Where'd the dog go?"

"H...he's no dog..." Ron whimpered, looking as if he wanted to cradle his wounded leg but knowing he couldn't. "It...it's *HIM*!"

"Him? Him who?" Harry asked.

"S...Sirius Black! He's... he's an Animagus!" Ron croaked.

"What?" Harry cried.

The door creaked shut behind the lot of them, causing them all to jump and whirl, wands aimed. Harry gasped at the haggard-looking man that had closed it. He was tall, lanky almost, with deep, matted black hair that hung past his waist. His clothes were tattered and too big for the half-dead frame they clung to. His eyes, somehow visible through the mess of hair, were sunken and skeleton-like, though Harry could barely make out a shine to them. When he grinned, Harry could see that his teeth were yellow and rotting. He had a maniacal look on his face as he slowly advanced.

"Harry." Sirius said, simply, his voice harsh and scratchy. "Good to see you're as quick as James was."

"Don't you talk about him!" Harry yelled, getting to his feet and positioning himself in front of Tonks, Ron, and Hermione. Solieyu took position next to him. "Don't you talk to him after... after what you did!"

"I did nothing." Sirius said. "...Put those damn things away. I'm unarmed. They snapped my wand when I was thrown into Azkaban."

"After what you did to Ron, I'm not lowering my wand." Harry growled, keeping it trained on Sirius as he moved towards the old bed.

"I've already apologized to the boy... Ron, did you say his name was? ...Already apologized to him for that. Wasn't after him, anyway." Sirius said, a strange look coming over his face.

"What? Then why'd you grab him and drag him off!" Harry asked, feeling slightly baffled.

"Wormtail." Sirius said, his voice filled with hatred.

"Wormtail?" Harry asked. That name was familiar - it was one of the people mentioned on the Marauder's Map.

"Wormtail!" Sirius repeated, sounding irritated. "Peter Pettigrew!"

"Peter Pettigrew is dead!" Tonks said. "You killed him along with that load of Muggles!"

"Don't talk to me about things you know nothing of, girl." Black said, staring at Tonks with a scowl.

"My mum's your cousin, you arse!" Tonks replied in a huff.

Sirius blinked. "Your mum?" He repeated. "...What's her name?"

"Andromeda Tonks!" Said the girl.

Sirius' eyes lit up. "Little Andi had a daughter?" He shook himself out of his surprise and sighed. "Anyway... as I was saying, Pettigrew isn't dead."

"Explain." Harry said.

But before Harry could do that, the door burst open again. All heads turned to see Remus Lupin enter, his wand out, his eyes darting around the room. When they landed on Sirius, his wand arm fell limpy to his side.

"Remus." Sirius said.

"Sirius..." Lupin breathed.

Sirius got to his feet with a grunt as Lupin walked over.

"You look terrible." Sirius said, giving Lupin a once-over.

"Look who's talking." Lupin said. "Care to explain what's going on, Sirius?"

"Was about to when you came in." Sirius said, shrugging. "That lot aren't giving me much choice."

Lupin glanced aside. "Put your wands away. He's unarmed."

"That's what I said." Sirius muttered.

"Don't... don't tell me you're taking *his* side!" Harry said, disbelief etched in his voice.

"I'm taking no one's side until I hear the full story." Lupin said. "Now then. Sirius... did I hear you mentioning Peter?"

"You did." Sirius said. "Listening at the door, were you? Yes... Pettigrew is here with us now."

"That would mean he faked his death all those years ago." Lupin said, head tilted in thought.

"Yeah. Blew himself up with that street full of Muggles." Sirius growled. "Perfect frame-up job, too."

"...Sirius? Does that mean... Did you switch?" Lupin asked.

Sirius nodded slowly. "I would have told you, but..."

"But you thought I was the traitor..." Lupin finished, sadly.

And then, as Harry watched on in horror, the two men threw their arms around one another in a tight hug. Solieyu sucked in a sharp breath beside him. And both Tonks and Hermione seemed beyond words.

"You *are* on his side!" Harry roared. "You were probably the one to let him into the castle that time, weren't you?"

"Of course he wasn't." Sirius growled, stepping away from Lupin. "Got in through the passage from Honeydukes. Glad it was still there..."

"You know about that? But... but how?" Harry asked.

"Of course he knew about it, Harry." Lupin said, reaching into his robes and pulling out a piece of parchment. "The two of us, along with your father and Peter, probably knew Hogwarts better than anyone else."

"...You *did* make the Map." Harry said, narrowing his eyes. "I *thought* that excuse you gave was pretty feeble."

Chuckling, Lupin shook his head. "A mistake to try and put something past you, I admit. Now then... why don't we all sit down and go over what's going on?"

"There's nothing to go over!" Sirius barked. "Tell that boy to hand Pettigrew over and we'll be done with it!"

Sirius was glaring at Ron, who looked confused through his pain. "Wh...what're you talking about...?"

"Your rat, boy!" Sirius said, advancing towards the redhead. "Give me your rat!"

"Scabbers? Why do you want him?" Ron asked.

"His name isn't Scabbers, it's Wormtail." Sirius growled.

"I'm not givin' Scabbers over to you!" Ron said in a squeaky voice.

"Remus!" Sirius yelled in frustration, turning to face the other man.

"I'm afraid you *aren't* making much sense to them, Padfoot old friend." Lupin said. "Now, explain it to us, will you? First, how did you get out of Azkaban? And why did you come here? For that matter, how do you know Ron's rat is Peter?"

"His foot!" Sirius growled, reaching into his tattered clothes and procuring a bit of old, wrinkled newspaper. "Look at this." He said, setting the clipping down on the bed.

"That's Ron and his family... they went to visit his brother Charlie over the summer!" Hermione said. "Ginny was telling me all about it!"

"Right. Now look in the boy's pocket, Moony. Look *closely*." Sirius said.

Lupin walked over and glanced down at the newspaper. After a moment his eyes widened. "I don't believe it..."

"Could someone fill *us* in?" Harry spat.

"You know the story of how Sirius supposedly killed Peter?" Lupin began, facing the students. When they nodded, he continued, "Well, they say the only bit of him they found was a finger. And, if this photo is to be believed... Ron's rat is missing one."

At this, all heads turned towards Ron, who was looking at them all strangely. "He... he just got into a fight or something!"

"Ron." Lupin said, stepping over. "Let me see him. If he really is just a rat, we'll give him back to you. The spell doesn't hurt him at all."

Ron tried thinking of a response, but failed, reaching into his robes and attempting to pull Scabbers out. When he did, the rat was squealing and frantic. A second later and Ron let out a sharp swear, dropping the rat and exclaiming, "He *bit* me!"

"**GET HIM!**" Sirius said, rushing over to the door and slamming it closed as Lupin followed the rat's path with his wand. Eyes narrowing, he picked just the right moment and fired a beam of light at the rat. The rat's body expanded, outward and upward as he tumbled to a halt against the wall the door was on. He was missing hair in various places on his head, as if he had pulled random bits out. He had a sunken look almost as bad as Sirius, though not nearly as defined. He was scrawny and his robes were torn and hung loosely off of him, as if he had lost a lot of weight in a short period of time. His large, round eyes darted back and forth to everyone in the room, finally resting on Lupin, who was having to hold a maniacal Sirius back forcefully. Despite this, he gave the man a smile.

"Hello, Peter."

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Author's Notes: Everything will be explained next chapter, so no one gets to gripe about the order I'm doing things in. Though I am kinda unsure of whether Sirius using the term 'Little Andi' in regards to Andromeda would be correct. I'm just naturally assuming Andromeda was younger than him. Doesn't matter by how much. He could've called her that to irritate her.

So Sirius and Pettigrew have finally been introduced properly! I hated the way both of them looked in the movie. Sirius' hair was short and he had tattoos. Who's gonna give him tattoos? The Dementors? And I won't even get started on Wormtail. Stupid giant rat teeth.

So yeah, we've only hit the first part of the fun in the Shrieking Shack. I'm happy I was able to get this chapter out when I originally promised I would. The next one may be equally as long, so give me a week or so to put it together. Gonna hafta get down my copy of PoA and double check some stuff for it, which might delay me a bit.

Um... not got a lot to say, really. Hope everyone enjoyed the extended chapter and I'll see you when I see you!

Post-edit update: This one gave me some weird editing issues. I think I hammered them all out. But I'm doing this at 5:12 AM, and I'm not altogether 'here' at the moment. So apologies if I missed anything. All questions answered next chapter - no one get onto me about possible plotholes just yet please.

Chapter 16 – The Best Laid Plans

Everyone stared at the place where the rat had previously been. Ron looked ill.

Peter Pettigrew, scrambling to his feet, stared around the room, eyes wide. "R...Remus!" He said, attempting a cheerful tone. "H...How are you?"

"Very well, thank you." Said Lupin, smiling pleasantly. "You, on the other hand, aren't going to be so well in the near future."

"Wh-what do you mean?" Pettigrew asked.

"He means that he's gonna let *me* at you. I'll blow off more than just a damned finger!" Sirius growled, starting forward. But Lupin turned and grabbed him by the shoulders, sighing and holding him back.

"Not yet, Sirius. We've still got a story to tell, unfortunately. So for the time being..." Lupin began, quickly turning and, in one swift move, summoned Pettigrew's wand and bound him with magical ropes. "Behave yourself until we're done, Peter, or I *will* let Sirius on you."

Pettigrew just nodded, swallowing hard.

"Sit." Lupin then commanded, looking at Sirius. Sirius scowled in reply, fought the stare with one of his own, then made a noise and turned to sit on the edge of the ragged, old bed.

"And you lot, put your wands away." Lupin said, turning to the students. "I'll summon them like I summoned Peter's if you don't. I won't have the Shrieking Shack destroyed. There are a lot of memories here for me."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked.

"He's... he's a... a..." Hermione started, looking at Lupin strangely.

"A werewolf, yes." Lupin finished for her. "...How long have you known?"

"...You kept disappearing. Professor Snape seemed very keen on studying werewolves when he substituted for you." Hermione said, not quite meeting the older man's gaze.

"I *knew* you smelled different." Solieyu commented, glaring outright at the man.

Lupin chuckled softly. "I'm sure I would. Albus has informed me, of course, of *your* condition..."

"What condition?" Hermione asked, turning to look at Solieyu.

"I'm a vampire." Solieyu commented in a very offhanded way. This caused Tonks and Harry to look at each other in confusion. Given that it had taken thier friend upwards of three years to inform them, he didn't seem very phased to be explaining it to a room full of relative strangers.

"Ooh, I *knew* it had to be something like that!" Hermione said, eyes bright. "At first, I thought you might be a werewolf too, but the patterns didn't match up."

"So lemme get this straight." Ron said, letting out a disbelieving laugh. "I'm in the room with a werewolf, a vampire, a murderer, and a pervert? Oh, that's just great."

"A pervert?" Lupin asked.

"**HIM!**" Ron said, pointing an accusing finger at Pettigrew. "He had free reign of the Burrow! Oh, yuck, he's probably watched Ginny changing and stuff!"

"N-no..." Pettigrew began, feebly. "I...I would never..."

"Quiet, Peter." Lupin said. "Anyway, I'm a werewolf, yes. And yes, Albus knows. As I'm sure you've seen, Mr. Reinhardt, he's got a bit of a soft spot for people that most would consider to be 'dark creatures.'"

"Indeed." Solieyu said, crossing his arms.

"Now then. Come on, wands away, all of you." Lupin said. When the students did as they were told, he smiled and turned to Sirius. "Now then. Sirius, you're going to have to begin this. I only know a small part of it."

"Well," Sirius began, chancing a look aside at Harry. "The long and short of it is this: I was convinced Voldemort--" He glared at Pettigrew, who had hissed violently at the sound of the Dark Lord's name "--VOLDEMORT would come after me, as I would seem like the most obvious choice. Everyone knew James and I were best friends in school. Hell, half of the school knew I had left home to stay with him."

"What?" Harry asked, now turning to look at Sirius. "Why would you be staying with my dad?"

"Because of my parents." Sirius said, the look on his face somehow growing darker. "I couldn't stand their pure-blooded bulls--" A cough from Lupin caused him to pause, then reword his sentence. "...Their pure-blooded nonsense any longer. Mother never did like me very much, and father was always off on 'business' trips. So I jumped ship and stayed with your dad and his family, Harry."

"Anyway... When your parents decided to go into hiding, they had originally decided on me as their secret keeper. I just couldn't sit well with that, because I knew I would be the first person Voldemort would come after. So I convinced them to switch. I didn't kill Lily and James, Harry... though I might as well have, since I sent them to their deaths by saying that *he* was a better choice." Sirius spat, fury in his eyes as he stared at Pettigrew, who was avoiding Sirius' gaze as best he could.

"None of that, Sirius." Lupin said, walking over and placing a hand on the man's shoulder. "It's as much my fault as yours. Because of my condition--"

"Oh, *HANG* your condition, Moony, it wasn't because of that. You were just *gone* all the time. No one could ever get ahold of you." Sirius said, waving a dismissing hand. "Anyway, Lily and James agreed to switch. When I found out what Wormtail had done, I chased after him. I finally cornered him on that street. Then he started yelling about how I was the traitor. Filthy little rat faked his own death and

left me to face the charges. Very clever, I must admit, Wormtail. Blowing off one of your own fingers to act as evidence."

Sirius rubbed the bridge of his nose before continuing. "My time in Azkaban... it's fuzzy. I can't remember much of it. I spent most of the time in my dog form. The Dementors don't affect animals as much, so it was easier to handle. Then that bumbling idiot *Fudge* paid me a little visit during a routine trip. He had a copy of the Prophet on him. Asked if I could have it. The fool agreed and that's where I saw the picture of Wormtail. A few days later, I slipped by the Dementors when they came to bring me my meal. They can't see like we can. They can only sense potential food. And danger, I suppose. But as I was underweight and weak, I made it out, though the swim to land damn near killed me.

"As soon as I hit the shore, I made my way here. I waited, watching people go about their daily schedules. You're damn good on a broom, Harry. I tried keeping the Willow from destroying your old broom. Didn't do such a good job of it though. Hope the new one makes up for it, though." Sirius said.

"So you *did* send it, huh?" Harry asked.

"Yup. And no arguing about the price. The Black family vaults are far too full. I'd rather they be spent on things we can enjoy rather than what my parents used it for. I snuck into Gryffindor Tower after I happened across a list of passwords someone had left out in the open." Sirius continued.

"Neville..." Hermione and Ron groaned at the same time.

"What?" Tonks asked.

"He always has trouble remembering the password. So he started writing them down." Hermione explained.

"Didn't meant to scare you." Sirius said, glancing Ron's way. "I just figured Harry would be sorted into the same house Lily and James were in."

"Weren't close enough to notice the colors on my robes?" Harry asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Not as such. My eyes have gotten rather bad. Blame spending months in pitch black cells." Sirius explained.

"Alright, that answers a couple things." Tonks began, slowly turning towards Lupin. "So what's all this about you making that Map?"

"Ahh, yes." Lupin began, chuckling. "Well, it wasn't just me. Your father, Harry, helped. As did Sirius and Peter. We used the names we called each other so as to not get in any trouble. Sirius and James decided to give me the name 'Moony,' what with my condition and all. Sirius is Padfoot, Peter is Wormtail, and James was Prongs."

"Why Prongs?" Harry asked.

"Turned into a stag." Sirius said, shrugging. "Biggest one of the lot of us. After we worked out Moony's little problem, we worked out a way to make things less difficult on him. So the three of us became illegal Animagi and joined Moony during his transformations."

"Nice of you." Solieyu commented, dryly.

"It was." Lupin said. "All my life, I had been treated differently because of my condition. The Whomping Willow was planted the year I came to Hogwarts, you know. When that time rolled around, Poppy Pomfrey would escort me out to it, hit the knot that stopped the tree, and showed me to this place."

"Of course, Moony's unfortunate habit of being noisy during the full moon led people to believe this old place was haunted." Sirius said, smirking crookedly. "We did little to try and change the public's thought on that, of course. The Shack was loaded with wards to keep anyone from even getting close to it, though."

"Yes. Most of the damage done to this place was done by me." Lupin said, glancing around the room. "So... have we any other questions to answer?"

"...You really weren't the one to get my parents killed?" Harry asked, looking straight into Sirius' eyes.

"I swear." Sirius said, returning the gaze. "If I had known what Wormtail was planning to do, I would've remained the secret keeper myself."

"And you would've gotten killed!" Pettigrew suddenly screeched. "The Dark Lord would have tortured you... would have killed you!"

"Better to die protecting my friends than being the reason they're dead!" Sirius barked, getting to his feet.

"I'm afraid I have to side with Sirius this time, Peter." Lupin said, holding Pettigrew's wand out to the side, where Sirius took it. "It's regrettable that you were so weak, Peter. I honestly expected better of you."

"You don't understand!" Pettigrew whined. "I had no choice! He would have killed *me* if I hadn't done what he told me!"

"Then you should have died." Growled Sirius.

"I don't believe for a moment that you were somehow tricked into doing his bidding, Peter." Lupin said, sighing as he drew his own wand. "You always did gravitate towards those with more power than yourself. You always wanted to become stronger by any means necessary."

"No... n-no..." Pettigrew began, working out what was happening. Quickly, he turned and stared pleadingly in the direction of the students. "P-please! Harry! You... you must know that... that I didn't want Lily and James to..."

"Don't you talk about them." Harry growled, in a manner not unlike Sirius'. "You don't have the right to even say their names."

Tonks and Solieyu glanced at one another. It was rare to see Harry as worked up as he currently was. No one else might notice the change that had come over him, but they did. Tonks had seen Harry fuming in a quiet rage only a few times in the past. She briefly

wondered if Harry was about to try blowing up Pettigrew like he had done to his Aunt last summer.

Pettigrew switched tactics, looking at Ron now. "M...Master... Please..."

"Don't call me your master, you sicko!" Ron said, looking thoroughly disgusted. "You slept in my *BED*..."

"I... I would have been killed..." Pettigrew said, his voice shaking. "The Dark Lord would have killed me..."

"You could have protected Lily and James. But you chose not to. You should have realized - if Voldemort didn't kill you, then we would." Lupin said. As Sirius took up the spot beside him, both aimed their wands down at the thin man, who let out a whimper. "Goodbye, Peter."

"No!" Harry said suddenly, rushing forward and getting between the two groups.

"Harry..." Lupin said.

"He's the reason they're dead!" Sirius roared.

"Yeah... but do you really think mum and dad would want you two to become killers just because of him?" Harry asked, looking from one man to the other. "We'll take him back to the school. I'm sure the Dementors are hungry. They've not had anything to feed on this year. They've been restless lately."

Sirius' eyes shone. "You know... I like the way you think."

"The way I see it..." Harry said, turning to stare down at Pettigrew. "He deserves worse than death. So let them feed."

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Ron bounced grumpily through the air, muttering darkly under his breath. Next to him, Hermione just patted his arm comfortingly. Lupin, who was leading the group back through the tunnel, was also the one

toting Ron about. He had healed up the boy's broken leg as best he could before they had set off.

Sirius and Harry were in the rear of the pack, Sirius hovering Pettigrew (upside-down) through the air. Tonks and Solieyu walked between the two groups, though Tonks kept glancing back to Harry, whose eyes seemed to be glazed over.

"I'm sorry." Sirius murmured softly, gently nudging Harry's arm.

"Huh? ...What for?" Harry asked.

"...Dammit, I'm not sure. Everything? Being the reason the bloody Dementors are here at Hogwarts, being responsible for Lily and James' deaths..."

"You weren't responsible." Harry said. "And... and I don't blame you. You were set up. You couldn't have predicted that he would turn on you all."

"I should have." Sirius said. "He never was much of a wizard, always clinging to those stronger than he was. The only reason me and Moony let him hang around us was because James insisted. He was nice like that."

"Seems like he and mum were always being nice to everyone." Harry said. "I haven't heard anyone say anything bad about them, anyway."

"Well, almost everyone." Sirius said, chuckling. "Never did like Snape..."

"Snape? ...Severus Snape?" Harry asked.

"Yeah. How'd you know?" Sirius asked, frowning.

"He teaches Potions nowadays." Lupin called from the front.

"What! Snivellus is *teaching*? What's the world coming to?" Sirius said, shaking his head. He then glanced at Harry, who had snorted loudly. "What're you laughing at?"

"*'Snivellus'?*" Harry repeated.

"Ah yes. Our glorious nickname for him. He was always a loner, brooding off under a tree and reading. Probably reading books filled with angst and how not to wash your hair. Tell me, has he figured out how to work a shower yet?" Sirius asked.

"If you're asking about his hair, then no. Rather greasy." Harry said.

"Some things never change." Sirius said.

"So... uh... what are you gonna do now?" Harry asked, frowning.

"Well, I'm hoping that turning Wormtail in will at least let me have a trial. The Ministry saw fit to just throw me into Azkaban without one, see." Sirius explained.

"What!" Harry cried. "But... but that isn't..."

"Fair? No, it isn't. But those were the times. I don't like it, but there you go. Anyway, once Wormtail's handed over to the Ministry - hopefully to be Kissed by the Dementors - then... I don't know. I haven't thought that far ahead. I... was thinking... and, don't get me wrong, I'm sure you're happy where you are, but... once I became a free man again, I was wondering if you'd like to come and stay with me. I don't know if anyone's told you, but Lily and James made me your godfather."

Harry stared at the man. "W...what?"

"Right, nevermind." Sirius said, quickly. "It was a stupid idea. I just thought--"

"What are you talking about? I'd *love* to come and stay with you!" Harry exclaimed.

"What?" Sirius said, blinking.

"The Dursleys... Dumbledore saw fit to throw me in with mum's sister and her family. They haven't exactly taken good care of me." Harry said.

Hanging back to join in the hushed conversation, Tonks piped in, "You should see his body. All scarred up and stuff. I hope you *do* take him, just so I won't hafta worry about him turning up bloody and half-dead at our place again."

"**AGAIN?**" Sirius cried.

"I'll tell you later." Harry mumbled, glancing ahead at Ron and Hermione.

Sirius nodded slowly. "Alright. Just remember that you do." And then, turning to Tonks, he asked, "How's Little Andi doing these days, anyway?"

Tonks snorted. "Mum'll have a fit if you call her that. She's fine. Got a job at the Ministry. Boring stuff, I think, but she seems happy enough with it."

"Sounds about right. She never did like standing out alot. Just wasn't her way. Who'd she marry?" Sirius asked.

Tonks scowled. "Ted Tonks. Lovely man."

Sirius raised an eyebrow.

"I don't see much of him anymore." Tonks explained simply.

"Ahh."

The group walked in silence after that. Once they were at the other end of the passage, Lupin turned around. "Sirius, if you'd be so kind?"

"My pleasure." Sirius said, grinning before shifting into his dog form and scampering up and out the hole. There was a faint noise as he shifted, which no one seemed to hear. Then the distinct sound of the Willow pitching a wobbly, then all went silent.

"Follow me!" Lupin then said, climbing out of the passage with Ron (and now Wormtail) in tow.

"What a day." Harry said as the group got a safe distance away from the Willow. "I'm just glad it's almost over. I can't wait to crawl into bed."

"Better not say that, mate. You'll jinx things." Tonks said.

"Don't see how." Harry said, shrugging.

"Um... I think I know how." Solieyu said. He was glancing over his friends' shoulders. The group turned and saw Wormtail and Ron on the group, with Hermione kneeling next to the redhead. Sirius was standing in front of Lupin, clutching his shoulders and shaking him every so often.

"Damn it." Harry growled, running up. "What's going on?"

"Full moon!" Sirius cried. "Moony, snap out of it! You can't do this now! We've got to get Wormtail up to the school! I know you can hold off! You've got to!"

"Hermione! Get Ron out of here! Go get Dumbledore!" Solieyu called out. The bushy-haired girl looked up, surveyed the scene quickly, then nodded and got to her feet, levitating Ron into the air and hastily retreating back up towards the school with him.

"Harry - get Tonks out of here, as well." Solieyu growled.

"What? Leon, what's..." Harry began.

"I thought you did research about werewolves." Solieyu said, turning to glare at him. "You *did* see the part about them being unable to control themselves once they change, didn't you?"

"Crap." Harry swore.

"Yes. So get Tonks out of here. You two aren't going to be able to do much." Solieyu said.

"Well what about you?" Tonks asked.

But before Solieyu could reply, Lupin let out a strangled cry that caused everyone's attention to snap to him. Sirius was backing up slowly, quickly sending a warning glance to the three Ravenclaws before shifting forms and adopting a defensive pose. From next to them, Solieyu performed a shift of his own, changing into his overly-large wolf form.

"Crap." Harry swore again. "Tonks...?"

"I can't just leave him!" Tonks said, motioning towards Sirius. "He's family! And innocent! *AND* he's gonna get you outta that hell hole Dumbledore sticks you in every summer! We've got to do *something*!"

"Yeah, but what?" Harry asked.

"I don't-- oh crap, **MOVE!**" Tonks said, shoving Harry hard before flinging herself off in the other direction. She was just in time, as seconds later a massive wolf - far larger than Solieyu's form - burst through, growling savagely. Moments later, Sirius and Solieyu were chasing after it, heading towards the Forbidden Forest.

"All alone, are we?" Came the voice of Peter Pettigrew, who was on his side and looking amused.

"Shut up!" Harry said. "What the hell do you look so pleased about, anyway?"

"With Remus off chasing the moon and your little friends gone... there's no one stopping me from doing *this*." Pettigrew said. And, before either Harry or Tonks could do something, Pettigrew had shifted forms as well. Once more a rat, it was quickly lost in the darkness.

"Damn it!" Harry exclaimed. "Tonks, come on! We've got to go after him!"

"This night keeps getting better and better." Said the girl, taking off after Harry.

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"Can you see anything?" Harry whispered.

"No. Can you?" Replied Tonks.

"If I could, I wouldn't have asked." Harry said.

"Right, sorry. Not thinking clearly right not. It's damn creepy in this forest." Tonks said.

"I'll happily agree with you there." Harry said. "Dammit, this is just insane. We're gonna end up getting eaten by Acromantulas at this rate."

"Maybe we'll luck out and they'll eat Pettigrew instead." Tonks said.

"Wishful thinking." Harry muttered. "I wish I could track him or instantly go to where he is or something. ...Sayyy, wait a minute. That might actually work."

"What might?" Asked Tonks.

"Watch. *Accio Wormtail!*" Harry said, hissing out the incantation.

Frantic squeaking filled the air as a rat came flying through the woods, landing at Harry's feet. The Ravenclaw smirked down at the rat. "Hullo, Peter. Nice of you to answer my call."

The rat rolled over and started rushing off again. Harry sighed and aimed at where the little vermin was headed, *Accio*-ing him back again. And once more, the rat tried making a break from it.

"Dammit. Tonks, will you stun that balding git this time?" Harry asked.

"Will do!" Said Tonks, readying her wand.

"*Accio Wormtail!*" Harry called again. And once more, the rat flew through the air back towards the two teens. However, when he landed this time, he quickly shifted back to human form.

"You'd better watch yourself, Harry." Said Pettigrew.

"Or what?" Harry asked, holding an arm out to prevent Tonks from firing her stunner just yet. "Or you'll nibble my ankles to death?"

"If you think I'm your problem in here, then you're a rather stupid Ravenclaw." Pettigrew said, letting out a croaking sort of laugh. He then drew in a deep breath. By the time Harry figured out what was happening, it was too late to do anything. Pettigrew had let out an ear-splitting yell, fired off a couple of spells at the two Ravenclaws, then one at himself, and finally transformed and scampered off again.

Harry and Tonks managed to avoid the spells, as Pettigrew was more than a little rusty with his wandwork after spending so much time in rat form. Harry tried Accio-ing him back, but nothing came this time. Frowning, Harry turned to Tonks. "You think he's actually smart enough to make it so he can't BE summoned?"

"Looks like it. What'd that idiot have to go and yell for?" Tonks asked, rubbing at her ears.

"To alert everything in the blasted forest that we're here, probably. Damn it. We can tell Dumbledore about Pettigrew. He might be able to track the little rat down. Let's go see if we can't find Sirius and Leon." Harry said, turning around and giving a venom-filled glare at the dark forest that he was leaving behind.

"Good idea, but where do we start looking?" Tonks asked.

"I dunno. But I know how we figure it out." Harry said, a grim expression setting in.

"How...?"

"We follow the cold."

"Hey, Harry?"

"Yeah?"

"When did that idiot get his wand back?"

"...I dunno."

The two eventually picked up on the sensation that Harry was dreading. It was coming from the general direction of the lake. As they ran, (hearing all manner of disturbing noises that seemed to be following them) Harry explained his plan to Tonks. The Dementors, who presumably had been without 'food' all year, were getting restless. This, in turn, was probably going to cause them to flock to any high surge of energy, like most of the school being at the Quidditch game. Meaning that a werewolf being chased by a vampire and an Animagus was likely to stir them up.

It also meant that Harry and Tonks were probably going to be thrown into the midst of the foul things eventually. But if it had to be done, it had to be done. After all, they couldn't just leave the trio out there. Lupin might be fine on his own, but Harry had a feeling that Sirius and Solieyu wouldn't be so lucky.

"There!" Harry hissed, pointing through an open line of trees. Sirius and Solieyu were standing back to back. Sure enough, a massive, black wave of Dementors was closing in from all around them. "Dammit... this isn't good. If Sirius was able to cast a Patronus before Azkaban, I doubt he can now. And Leon probably isn't going to know how..."

"Meaning you're going to have to do all the work?" Tonks squeaked.

"Something like that. Get back up to the school, Tonks. I don't want you getting caught." Harry said, turning to face the girl.

"I'm not going anywhere! Hermione went for backup, remember?" Tonks said.

"Yes, but I still don't want those things getting anywhere near you." Harry said.

"I can take care of myself. I was listening in on enough of your lessons to know the general idea." Tonks said, puffing herself up.

"Knowing and doing are two different things, Tonks. Please, just go back to the castle!" Harry said, glancing over to see his godfather and friend firing useless spells towards the Dementors. "We don't have time to argue about this!"

Tonks stared up into Harry's eyes for a brief moment before nodding. "Alright. But if you get your soul sucked out or something, I'm gonna kill you."

"I'll be alright." Harry said. "Be careful on your way back."

"You be careful out *there*." Tonks said.

"I will." Harry promised. "Stay safe."

And with that, he was off. Tonks watched him bolt down towards Sirius and Solieyu, then turned and took off running full tilt in the direction of the castle.

"Sirius! Leon!" Harry yelled, ducking out of the way of a pair of Dementors as he joined up with the other two. "Fancy meeting you here!"

"Harry! What are you *doing*?" Sirius cried. "Get out of here!"

"Can't do that, Sirius." Harry said. "Leon, what happened to Lupin?"

"Dementors swarmed and he leapt clean over them. He's out *theresomewhere* now." Solieyu said. "Where's Tonks?"

"Sent her back towards the castle. Bit dangerous out here." Harry said, smiling strangely.

"Protecting the girl you love by running into the thick of it yourself, eh?" Solieyu asked, chuckling dryly.

"More or less. Either of you able to conjure a Patronus?" Harry asked.

"Used to be able to." Sirius gruffed.

"I've never tried." Solieyu said.

"Expecto Patronum - that's what you use. It's fueled by happy moments. I can't imagine it's going to be very easy bringing up those *here*. I'm having a bit of a hard time just *standing* here... but that's what it is." Harry said.

Indeed, the effects of the dozens of Dementors was practically overpowering. Even running on almost pure adrenaline as he was, the effect was immense. Still, the things that had happened that night were settling slowly. He wasn't going to have to go back to the Dursleys that summer. He and Tonks could lounge around *enjoying* their days off. Harry wasn't sure if Sirius had a house or anything, but even an apartment would be better than Number Four.

He could just make out the sounds of the other two, trying to form a Patronus of their own. Harry could barely make their voices out due to his mother's screams in his head being so loud.

"Mum... help me..." He murmured. "Sirius is innocent... I'm going to tell Tonks how I feel... I have to survive. So please..."

But his pleas went unanswered. The Dementors, who had collectively stopped advancing when Harry jumped into the fray, began to move forward once more. To his right, Solieyu dropped to his knees, his eyes squeezed shut. Slowly, Sirius followed, gasping out for the Dementors to stay away from him.

'No... I can't let them take Leon and Sirius...' Thought Harry, dropping to one knee himself. *'Expecto... Patronum... Expecto Patronum...'*

One of the Dementors pulled back its hood. A gaping void where the mouth should have been opened up, waiting to draw out a soul. It swooped in and grabbed Sirius by the shoulders, making a horrible rattling sound that Harry could only assume was the thing breathing.

'Expecto... Expecto Patronum...' Harry thought feebly as he turned and aimed his wand at the Dementor holding Sirius. *'Expecto...'*

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!" Roared a voice in the distance.

A large, silver object crashed into the Dementor holding Sirius. The Dementor was flung off into the trees, collapsing to the ground momentarily. But the silver object didn't stop there. It made a wide sweep of the area, ramming into Dementors and throwing them in every direction away from Harry, Solieyu, and Sirius.

Eventually, the creatures made a hasty retreat when they realized they wouldn't be able to get to the three humans so long as the glowing creature was there. Sirius had collapsed and Solieyu seemed to be joining him. Harry had just enough energy to turn around and look in the direction the Patronus had been conjured from.

His vision was fading fast, and he only just was able to catch a glimpse of the figure standing across the lake, wand out. The silver creature had made its way back across to the person, who patted it on the head. Harry collapsed onto his side, his eyes closing by themselves. He had seen it with his own two eyes, but... no, that just couldn't be, could it?

"D...dad?"

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Author's Notes: Philosopher's Stone is being fixed now, by the way. Stupid FFN screwing up my formatting when I wasn't looking. It honestly looked fine until recently. It wasn't THAT long ago that I checked it to see what the hell people were telling me 'omg format bad'

but it looked alright. And then, on the 24th when someone on my forum (yeah, I have that now, if you lot wanna go chat it up about my awful rewrite here c.c) and I looked, from chapter 10 to the end, it was all botched. ...And then, after fixing one chapter, FFN started giving me 503 errors. Apparently, just to piss me off. Hurrrrrr...

Anyway, I'll slowly get Philosopher's Stone fixed. Gimme a few days. I'm horribly lazy when it comes to stuff like that.

I'm sure everyone knows what's coming next! The trip back through time and Sirius' escape! I'm still hoping for 19 chapters total, but it may only be 18. It depends on what I come up with regarding the last bits I have planned. But it's nothing to worry about just yet, in any case. Until next time, folks!

Post-edit note: Chapter 17 would've been up tonight as well (and I'm sorry about 16 going up at almost 3AM CST) but I just have NOT felt good today. It'll go up sometime this week, though. I've been pretty good about keeping to my schedule lately...

Chapter 17 – Defying Fate

Harry let out a quiet groan.

"HARRY!"

Harry let out an *OOMPH* as what he could only assume was Tonks plowed into him. He coughed and patted her on the back, muttering, "G'offa me, Nymmy..."

"We've been worried about you, Harry." Came Hermione's voice from nearby.

Harry sat up, collecting his glasses and only then realizing that he was once more in the hospital wing. Ron was on a bed across from his own and Solieu was laying in one to his right. "...Damn! Where's Sirius!" He cried.

"Locked up in one of the towers." Tonks said, sighing.

"What?" Harry cried.

"Unfortunately, Professor Snape was with Professor Dumbledore when I found him. So they both came to 'help out,' so to speak. Tonks got to us on the stairway, telling us what was happening." Hermione explained.

"Snape had a *fit*." Tonks said. "He *really* doesn't like Sirius. It was... really, really creepy, Harry. Snape had this *look* on his face. And he said he was going to personally watch as the Dementors sucked out Sirius' soul!"

"I hate Snape." Harry spat. "Dammit all, we need to go bust him out!"

"We can't." Hermione said, frowning. "An official from the Ministry will be here any time... We don't have the time, Harry."

"...Of course we have the time!" Harry said, throwing his arms up in frustration and getting out of bed. "Use your time turner."

"What? Oh, but Harry..."

Harry drew his wand. "I don't care if you use it and help us or if I have to stun you and *take* it, but I *am* using that thing!"

"Harry!" Hermione and Tonks both cried.

"I've got a way out. I've got a way out from the Dursleys. Once we catch Wormtail and Sirius gets his name cleared, I can go live with him. I'm not giving that chance up!" Harry said.

"And, I believe, you will not have to." Came a soft voice from behind, causing the three to turn around. Professor Dumbledore stood there, smiling as if horrible things weren't going to be happening soon.

"Professor!" Harry and Hermione both exclaimed at the same time.

Dumbledore raised a hand. "Miss Granger, while I understand your hesitation, I must say that I agree with Harry."

"Then... then you believe Sirius is innocent?" Harry asked.

"I do. Unfortunately, my word means very little to the Ministry." Dumbledore said. "Miss Granger, if I am not mistaken, you and Mr. Weasley were working on a way to get Hagrid's hippogriff exonerated?"

"Yes, sir." Hermione said.

Dumbledore smiled, a twinkle in his eyes. "Excellent. Then, I believe, three turns should just about do it..."

"Then... then you're...?"

"Yes, Miss Granger. I am giving you permission to do this." Said Dumbledore. "Though I must claim ignorance if anyone were to ask me. You understand, of course."

"Yes, sir." Hermione said. "...Alright, I guess we'll be going then. Harry, Tonks...?"

"What do we do?" Harry asked as he and Tonks walked over to Hermione, who pulled a small device on a chain out from her robes.

Hermione responded by looping the chain around her, Harry, and Tonks' necks. She then began turning a dial on the top. Harry reached up to inspect it, but quickly got his hand swatted away by both girls.

"Good luck." Said Dumbledore, turning to exit the hospital wing.

And then he was gone. Or rather, he had reversed himself and went through all the actions he had gone through since entering backwards. And he wasn't the only one. As Tonks and Harry watched on, they saw themselves being toted in, Ron and Solieyu being brought in and treated, and a general amount of hustle from Madam Pomfrey. Harry also was aware of it getting lighter outside. When things had stopped moving in reverse, Hermione sighed.

"Now listen, you two, you *do* know we can't let our past selves see our current selves, right?" Asked the Gryffindor girl.

"Right." Replied the two.

"Good. I've gotten used to it, and I actually *have* seen myself, but I *know* I've got a time turner and... oh, it's very complicated. I'm not mad just quite yet, though. Now let's get going. We need a safe place to sit and wait." Hermione said, removing the time turner's chain from around the Ravenclaws' necks.

"Sit and wait?" Harry repeated. "We aren't going to try and change anything?"

"Of course we are." Said Hermione, leading the other two out of the hospital wing. "But we can't be seen, remember? Let's go find a spot near Hagrid's hut. We should be able to see ourselves meeting Sirius in dog form and Ron getting dragged under the Willow from there."

"How did you do this all year?" Tonks asked.

"It wasn't easy. You saw how I was getting." Hermione said. "I... admit, I tried doing too much and it wasn't healthy. So thank you for helping me get back on track. And before you ask, yes, I've been sleeping properly lately."

The trio carefully made their way down to the Entrance Hall and out onto the grounds, where Hermione warned that they would need to be extra careful. As they made their way to Hagrid's hut, the three heard what sounded like crying.

Frowning, Hermione mouthed, "Buckbeak" and the two Ravenclaws nodded.

Finding a good temporary spot behind a group of trees, the trio watched as Hagrid, weeping heavily, patted Buckbeak and tried sounding encouraging.

"...Hermione?" Harry asked, quietly.

"Yes?"

"...Do you think Dumbledore mentioned Buckbeak for a reason?"

Hermione blinked. So did Tonks. Seemingly at the same time, the girls' eyes lit up and they exclaimed, "He wants us to save him!" at the same time.

"That's what I figure. Look, there goes Hagrid." Harry said. "Come on, let's get Buckbeak out of there."

"We'd better hurry. Look!" Hermione hissed, pointing back up towards the castle. The headmaster, Cornelius Fudge, as well as a large man with an even larger axe were walking out of the school. "We're going to be cutting it close... Come on!"

The three made their way through a thick section of trees, making sure they weren't seen by any of the men leisurely heading for Hagrid's hut, until they were behind Hagrid's pumpkin patch. Once there, Hermione told them that they should wait for a little longer, just in case. It was a good thing she did, as about five minutes later, the back door to the hut opened and Hagrid showed his visitors the hippogriff. The large man's eyes were wide and he looked like he was in shock. Once the door had closed again, Hermione rushed out, Tonks and Harry behind her.

"Buckbeak!" Harry hissed, approaching the hippogriff first. He didn't particularly *want* to, but he also didn't want the girls to get Malfoy-kabobbed, either. He bowed low to the ground, glancing up through his eyelashes. Finally, the hippogriff bowed back. Harry grinned and stood up straight, walking over. "I never did thank you for trying to bite Malfoy in half. We're here to free you. If we don't, one of those guys in Hagrid's hut plans to lob your head off or something."

"You think he understands?" Tonks asked.

"I think it doesn't hurt to believe so." Harry said. "Never underestimate a creature who can't speak back to you."

"Good advice." Hermione said, coming up and holding a dozen dead ferrets. "I've got some food to help lure him away if we need it."

Tonks aimed her wand at the chain holding Buckbeak to a large, metal post that was driven deep into the ground. A quick (and silent, upon Harry's insistence) burst of magical energy later and the hippogriff was free of his shackles.

"Come on!" Harry said. Hermione lead the way back into the forest, occasionally lobbing Buckbeak a ferret to down. For his part, Buckbeak seemed to enjoy his snacks and the chance to stretch his legs. Once they had lead Buckbeak a ways into the Forest, Hermione dumped the remaining ferrets on the ground. Buckbeak laid down nearby, snacking casually on them. As he did so, Harry approached and murmured, "I've got a favor to ask... and I really do hope you can understand me. My godfather is going to need some help tonight. Do... do you think you could, I dunno, fly off with him? We're going to have to break him out of one of the school's towers, so..."

Buckbeak looked up at Harry, half a ferret hanging out of his beak. Harry stared back for a moment before continuing, "Er... yeah, just... please, it'd be the best way for him to escape and I'm sure he'd feed you well."

The hippogriff swallowed the bit of ferret in his mouth then let out a content sort of chirping noise, which Harry had to assume meant that he was going to cooperate with them.

"Where'd you get the idea?" Tonks asked.

"Well, it just seemed natural." Harry said, rejoining the girls. "Buckbeak can fly, right? So he can fly off to freedom with Sirius. Two lives for the price of one."

"We should get in position. Our other selves should be showing up before too long." Hermione said.

Just then, there was a sudden, loud noise from the direction of Hagrid's hut that caused them all to jump.

"...Bet those guys aren't happy to lose a big ol' flying creature." Tonks commented, grinning.

"And I bet Dumbledore will keep them from investigating." Harry said. "...I wonder if he can tell when there's more than one pair of us running around. Hermione?"

"I have no idea, to be perfectly honest with you." Hermione said. "Anyway, let's make our way back. None of us saw the minister or that man with the axe, so we have to assume they were already gone by the time we were all out there."

"But didn't you and Ron start down there before the set time?" Harry asked.

"We did." Hermione said, frowning. "I wonder if they changed it."

"I bet Malfoy asked his daddy to push the time up. Even a half hour sooner would be good enough for him. And it *did* look like Hagrid was kind of surprised when he was showing Buckbeak to the group..."

Time passed by slowly, a fact that Harry was irritated with. Whenever something *needed* to be done, time always did seem to slow down. Eventually, however, their other selves finally put an appearance in.

"This is ten flavors of bizarre." Tonks whispered, watching as her other self approached Ron and Hermione with Harry and Solieyu.

"Remind me why you aren't in Ravenclaw again?" Harry asked, glancing over at Hermione, who didn't look interested in much of anything.

"I didn't want to get called a bookworm." Hermione said, shrugging.

"Yeah, *that* panned out well for you." Harry said, grinning crookedly.

"Oh, hush up." Hermione muttered. "Oh, look! Sirius is sneaking up on us!"

"How did we not see him get that close?" Harry asked. "You know, for being in Ravenclaw, I really feel stupid sometimes."

"Happens to all of us sooner or later." Hermione said. "Ouch! Poor Ron. You know, if Sirius just wanted Pettigrew, why didn't he just change back, Accio him from Ron's robes, and run off? It would've made more sense than biting down on Ron's leg and dragging him off."

"All that time in Azkaban probably messed with his head." Harry said. "I'm not sure I'd be thinking clearly, even after a good half year away from the place."

"Must be." Hermione said, nodding slowly. "...Annnd there we go, nearly getting killed by that tree."

"You know, looking at it now, that thing does look *really* suspicious just sitting out there. How'd Madam Pomfrey sneak Professor Lupin down there and get him into the tunnel on a regular basis without *anyone* noticing?" Harry asked.

"Disillusion charm, maybe." Hermione suggested. "Maybe an invisibility cloak?"

"So... we have to sit here and wait until we come back out, all friendly-like with Sirius?" Tonks asked. "What do we do until then?"

"Keep hidden." Hermione said. "Not much else *to* do."

"I don't think I have the patience to time travel." Tonks said.

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"I wonder if werewolves transform if the moon is *out* or if they have to actually *look* at it to trigger the transformation." Harry idly wondered.

"I thought you researched werewolves." Tonks said.

"I did... to the extent the school library would allow. But it always portrayed werewolves in a dark light. Sort of like vampires." Harry explained.

"Well," Hermione began, tapping her chin in thought. "I would guess that looking at the moon causes the transformation... though I would also guess that the moon must have some sort of pull over werewolves that *force* them to look up. Sort of like how certain wards make people suddenly turn away when they get too close."

"That sounds reasonable. Next time we see Professor Lupin, we'll have to ask." Harry said.

"Look!" Tonks hissed, pointing towards the Willow again. "We're coming out!"

"*Pettigrew.*" Harry hissed, making both girls jump. He blinked. "What?"

"You did it again." Tonks said.

"Did what?" Asked Harry.

"Spoke in Parseltongue." Hermione said. "That's... very eerie-sounding, I hope you know."

"It sounds like English to me. Sorry." Harry said. "Look, can't I just go wait in the forest for Pettigrew and...?"

"No." Hermione said. "As Pettigrew escaped the first time, that means that we - that is, the three of us that have time travelled back - didn't stop him. So even if you did, you wouldn't succeed because he got away the first time."

"...Time travel gives me a headache." Harry said. "Damn it, so we have to wait until Sirius actually gets moved *to* the tower?"

"More or less. But we'll need to go and get into a position where we can see you, Sirius, and Solieyu getting attacked by the Dementors." Hermione said. "You lot were down by the lake, right?"

"Right." Harry said, then stopped, frowning. "...I still don't know what happened down there. But... but I thought... I know it sounds stupid, but I could have *sworn* I saw my dad. He was the one that used the Patronus that saved the three of us."

"But that's impossible." Tonks said. "Your parents are... well..."

"I know, I know. But... look, I don't know. A lot of things happen that I can't explain. Let's just get down to a safe spot before our other selves go running all over creation, can we?" Harry asked.

"Sure thing. Come on, we shouldn't get seen if we go this way..." Hermione said, pointing deeper into the woods.

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Harry stopped, a shiver running through his body. "Gah!"

"What is it?" Tonks asked, looking back at him.

"We're getting close." Harry murmured. "I can feel them already."

"Really? Hermione, can you sense the Dementors yet?" Tonks asked. When Hermione shook her head, she turned back to Harry. "Early Dementor Warning System. Nice."

"Stifle it, Nymmy." Harry scowled, plodding forward again. "Come on. I...think I've worked something out. But I need to make sure."

"What do you think you've worked out?" Asked Hermione.

"Well, there's no way that was my dad that saved us, right? It had to have been... well, *me*. The me of right now, I mean." Harry explained.

"Ohhh, I see now. You saw yourself from the future, who had travelled back to the past, to save you so that you could return to the past and save yourself!" Hermione said.

"I hate time travel." Tonks commented.

"Oh, wow..." Hermione said, gasping as the three finally hit a clearing. The Dementors were swarming around the other Harry, Sirius, and Solieyu. Despite their best efforts, none of them were fairing very well.

"So if I saw myself across the lake - here - saving myself... that means I'm able to produce a really powerful Patronus, huh?" Harry muttered, more to himself than anyone else. "I dunno how you did this all year."

"It wasn't easy." Hermione admitted.

"Sirius and Leon are down!" Tonks said, suddenly.

And indeed they were. The other Harry was doing his best to stay on his feet, but it wasn't turning out good. Sirius and Solieyu were both on the ground, starting to curl up into fetal positions.

"Damn it all." Harry swore, rushing out to the edge of the lake. He couldn't process time travel very well when he was *experiencing* it, so he would have to reflect on the sheer ridiculousness of the situation later. All he knew at that moment was that he had saved himself once already, so he would have to do it again.

Harry drew and aimed his wand. And, fueled by the knowledge that he already had done this once, he roared, "**EXPECTO PATRONUM!**"

A massive, long form erupted from the tip of his wand, illuminating the whole area in a silver light. As the Patronus shot forward, it began taking form, which was both larger and more solid than it had ever been in his training with Lupin. It slammed into the Dementor holding Sirius up, sending it flying back into the trees. The Patronus then made a wide sweep of the area, sending Dementors every which way. As its tail end curled around the three humans, the Dementors started to retreat. Once it seemed as if his past self was indeed safe, Harry jerked back on his wand, causing his Patronus to soar back across

the lake. He smiled and patted the silver creature's large head before turning to glance at his other self, who had just passed out.

"Thank you." Harry hissed softly, dispersing the Patronus with the flick of his wrist. When he turned, it was to see both girls staring at him, wide-eyed.

"Your... your..." Hermione tried saying.

"Why... is your Patronus...?" Tonks attempted.

"A basilisk?" Harry finished. "I... I don't think I meant for it to be. It wasn't that big in training. It was just... I dunno. Large python-sized, sort of. I'm assuming the Patronus' size is determined by the threat and the magic put into conjuring it. And before you ask why it's a snake, I don't know that either. Though I do wonder if it isn't because of my own frustrations in not having a way to learn to control my Parseltongue..."

"We need to get back to Buckbeak..." Hermione said once she found her voice. "The rescue party should arrive pretty soon."

"I'm glad this is almost over." Harry said. "Bloody *tired* now. That Patronus took a lot out of me."

"I'm sure it did." Hermione said. "It was very impressive, Harry."

"Yeah. Just don't go using it around Ginny Weasley. You'd have the twins set on you in an instant." Tonks said.

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"Damn it. Why's *Snape* here?" Harry asked.

"I already told you." Hermione said, rolling her eyes.

"Yes, yes, I know." Harry grumped. "I mean on a larger scale. *WHY* is Snape *HERE*? Couldn't someone have banished him to some kind of limbo or something?"

"Now, Harry..." Hermione began.

"Quiet, you two!" Tonks whispered. "They're bringing you lot up."

"Oh goodie, Snape's levitating Sirius *and* me. Probably wouldn't mind *me* getting the Dementor's Kiss, either." Harry muttered darkly.

"Crap! Did Dumbledore just look this way?" Tonks squeaked.

"Probably." Harry said, eyeballing the headmaster wearily. "That man knows a lot of things. And I wanna know *how* he knows some of them."

"So now what?" Tonks asked. "We wait for Sirius to get locked up, then..."

"Then I go up on Buckbeak and break Sirius out." Harry said.

"Why just you?" Hermione asked.

"Because *you* are afraid of flying." Harry said. Turning to Tonks, he said, "And I'm not risking more than myself if something goes wrong."

"Hey! I can take care of myself!" Tonks said, crossing her arms.

"I know you can. But if I get caught, I'd rather be the *only* one getting thrown out of school. Providing that's all that happens." Harry said.

"You won't fail." Tonks said.

"How do you know?" Harry asked.

"Like you always say - you're the hero." Tonks said, smirking.

"Quiet, you."

A few minutes later, Harry asked, "Do you think it's safe?"

"I dunno." Hermione said, gnawing at her lower lip. "You know, you're assuming that Buckbeak is going to let you on..."

"He let me fly on him earlier in the year." Harry said. "I didn't *enjoy* it, but..."

"Well, get going, then. We'll act as lookouts. And distractions, if needed..." Hermione said.

"We're having a bad impact on you." Tonks said, grinning at Hermione as Harry rushed off.

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"Buckbeak!" Harry called, heading for the spot they left the hippogriff.

Thankfully, Buckbeak was still there, gnawing on a ferret head. He looked up when he saw Harry enter the clearing. Harry paused long enough to give the creature a deep, formal bow (to which Buckbeak returned) before approaching.

"Sorry to cut mealtime short, but it's time to go rescue my godfather from those idiots at the Ministry." Harry said. "I've ridden you once before - just before you tried eating Malfoy, remember? I'm hoping you'll let me - and Sirius - ride you again. We freed you - now I'm hoping you help free him."

The hippogriff stared at Harry for a long moment before getting to his feet and stretching his wings out. Harry hoped this meant that the creature was going to accept his request, so he moved closer. When he was within biting range and Buckbeak didn't try feasting on his body, Harry smiled. "Thanks."

Harry hopped onto the hippogriff's back carefully. "Let's get into the air, Buckbeak. We need to make a sweep of all the towers. But we're going to need to do it at a distance so no one sees us. We're already taking a pretty big risk just doing this..."

A few minutes later and the two were soaring through the air. Harry's vision had thankfully adjusted to the darkness already, but it was going to be hard keeping a safe distance away from the castle while searching the towers to try and find a sign of Sirius. If Harry had just brought his Firebolt along, things would have been so much easier. But it was up in his dorm in Ravenclaw Tower. And he didn't think that summoning it would be such a hot idea. He wasn't even sure he would be *able* to summon it. Especially without it being seen.

"In closer! I think I saw something glinting over there!" Harry called out to Buckbeak, pointing towards one of the higher towers.

The hippogriff shifted to the right, cornered sharply, and took off in the direction Harry had pointed in. Buckbeak drew in as close as his wings would allow. The noise they made had caused the tower's lone occupant to come to the (locked) door to see what was going on.

"Sirius!"

"Harry? What in the blazes...?"

"Step back from the door!" Harry called, drawing his wand.

Sirius did as he was instructed. Harry took careful aim and muttered, "Alohamora!"

The lock on the door popped open and Sirius pushed his way out of the tower. "So, do you want to tell me what's been going on? Last thing I remember is being surrounded by Dementors down at the lake."

"It's a long story, Sirius." Harry said. "I'll have to mail you or something, because we need to get out of sight *quick*. I'm already uncomfortable with how long we've been up here. We can't pull in too much closer - it's too small - do you think you can hop on from there?"

"I dunno... It's a long way down." Sirius said, peering over the edge.

"Buckbeak, fly up and over a bit. Get even with the ledge so Sirius can just step up and on!" Harry said, patting the hippogriff's back. Buckbeak did as he was asked, flapping higher up and just to the side a bit, making it so that the tower's ledge acted as a stair of sorts, which Sirius quickly used to hop onto the hippogriff, sitting behind Harry.

"Back to the ground!" Harry called. "You can finish off that last ferret!"

Buckbeak didn't need any further motivation to return to the ground. Seemingly knowing what Harry might ask, Buckbeak flew out a ways

before going into a steep descent back towards the clearing in the woods. Harry and Sirius quickly hopped off of the hippogriff's back, both thankful to be back on solid ground again. Hermione and Tonks were quick to arrive, Tonks throwing herself at Harry in a tight hug.

"You're something else, you know that?" Sirius said, grinning down at Harry.

"I didn't do this on my own. I'll explain better later on, but... we uh... we're kinda in two places at once right now." Harry said, grinning.

"Two places at once?" Sirius repeated. "How...?"

"No time, no time." Harry said. "Ours is running out, I think. Look, Sirius... Wormtail got away. I tried stopping him, but..."

"No worries, Harry." Sirius said. "I've got a few ideas on where the little rat might run off to."

"You're going to chase after him?" Harry asked.

"You're damn right I will." Sirius said. "...Don't worry, I'll be careful. As I never registered with the Ministry, no one but you lot know I'm a dog Animagus."

"With a hippogriff." Tonks added, eyebrow raised.

"Yes... Buckbeak, did you call him? Are you sure he'll let me ride him to safety?" Sirius asked, turning back to look at the hippogriff, who was indeed finishing off the single ferret he had left behind.

"He's alright. Just...bow low and wait for him to do the same. He seems to like me a bit. Plus we saved him from being executed, so he owes me one." Harry said, grinning again. The grin quickly fell, however. "I guess this means I'm going back to Number Four again this summer."

Sirius winced. "Afraid so. Sorry, Harry. If I had thought ahead, I would've put that little idiot into a full body bind or something so he wouldn't be able to transform."

"I thought you had his wand." Hermione said.

"Probably dropped it when I transformed to stop the Willow." Sirius said. "It's been so long since I've had *anything* on me other than my clothes, I forgot to adjust when I changed. Usually there's a small measure of things you need to remember. Otherwise you'd leave your clothes, wand, and everything else on you behind."

Harry sighed. "Just... just take care, alright?"

"Don't worry, Harry." Sirius said, stepping closer and giving Harry a one-armed hug. "They haven't gotten me yet. They won't get me after I take off, either. You may be seeing me again sooner than you think, anyway."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked.

Sirius waved a hand dismissively. "You'll see. I'll need to work some things out, though. And I'd better get going before someone realizes I've escaped again."

"Oh, crap, we'd better get going, too." Tonks said. "We're going to be late getting back to the hospital wing if we aren't. That won't be any good."

"Right. You lot get going. Looks like Buckbeak here has finished his food, so I'll be leaving, too." Sirius said, stepping back up to the hippogriff. "You ready to go?"

The hippogriff gave a slow nod and lowered down enough for Sirius to get back on. As Buckbeak rose, Sirius said, "Don't look so glum! James would have a laughing fit if he knew you managed to help me bust out like this! I'll see you all soon!"

And with that, they were gone. Harry was sure Buckbeak rising into the air and taking off had taken longer than it seemed, but it didn't feel like it. He was snapped back to reality by Tonks and Hermione both tugging on his arms. He smiled at them and the three began their run back up to the hospital wing.

Amazingly enough, they met no one on their way. Whether this had something to do with Dumbledore, whether it was the castle itself arranging itself so that they wouldn't see anyone, or whether they were just lucky, they didn't know. They arrived at the doors to the hospital wing just in time to see Dumbledore stepping out.

Panting, Harry said, "We did it."

"Did what?" Dumbledore asked.

"Come on, let's get back inside." Hermione said, pushing open the doors. They were just in time to see themselves vanishing.

"...I hate time travel." Harry said.

The doors closed behind them, a soft 'click' following. The headmaster's voice came through, happily wishing them a good night.

"He locked the doors." Tonks noticed.

"Of course. That way, we have a firm alibi." Harry said. "To be fair, we never technically left the hospital wing."

"I'm just glad it's over." Hermione said, walking over to a bed and flopping down on it.

"You and me both." Harry said, doing the same. Tonks sat down next to him.

"So now what?" Asked Tonks, nudging Harry softly.

"Dunno. We continue on as usual, hope Snape doesn't try poisoning us - I'm sure he'll blame us for Sirius' escape one way or another - and finish the year." Harry said, leaning back on his arms.

"When do you think we'll see him again?" Tonks asked.

"I'm not sure, but I hope he's careful. The last thing we need is for him to be seen in public. At least, not until we get ahold of Pettigrew." Harry said.

"I don't know about you two," Began Hermione, "But I'm dead tired. Since we're stuck in here for now anyway, why don't we get some sleep? I have a feeling we're going to need it."

"Excellent idea." Harry said. "I'm exhausted."

"Same here." Tonks chimed in.

The three made their ways to separate beds and laid down on them. They talked quietly for awhile longer, going over what they had just been through and what might happen tomorrow. They reckoned that the whole of the school would know about the previous night's events sooner or later, no matter what, and the best thing they could do was to play innocent. They were, after all, locked in the hospital wing by the headmaster himself. Surely no one could think that a trio of third years would be able to get by Dumbledore's magic.

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Author's Notes: Aha, I fixed a possible plot hole. Stupid time travel. Also, sorry in advance for the mass amount of scene splitters. It's so much easier to avoid 'en route' scenes and just get to business. Sorry this one took longer than expected. I wasn't feeling so hot over the weekend.

Oh man, I hate time travel. I'm sure there are other plot holes I opened up, but I'm not worrying about them now. And for those wondering - yes, Sirius DID drop Wormtail's wand in the last chapter. I made a one-liner about something hitting the ground or something to that effect.

Well, the main plot's wrapped up, but I'm still hoping to get two more chapters out of this. If not, the book ends on Chapter 18 and I get to have a little vacation to set up and work out Goblet Relit. I've got NOTHING but a few ideas planned so far. Some of them have been bouncing in my head since I started book 1, some have come to me during the writing of Prisoner here. In any case, check back soon. I'm so close - I want to finish quickly now!

Chapter 18 – Shooting Stars Again

Harry sighed, staring up at the ceiling (such as it was) of the Nest from his spot on the couch. It had been over a week since Sirius had escaped and Harry still didn't feel any better. He had gone through the last week in a sort of daze. As expected, the Hogwarts Rumor Mill had somehow caught wind of the goings on and stories spread like wildfire. Harry had just eventually tuned everyone out and tried going about his business as best he could.

In addition, to no one's great surprise, Snape was even more acidic towards Harry than ever before. It seemed the Potions Master blamed Harry for helping Sirius escape, despite Dumbledore telling the man that he made sure the students were safely locked in the hospital wing. But Snape obviously wasn't convinced by that story.

Sirius hadn't written yet, but Harry hadn't expected him to. It was far too soon and any post from him might be traced. The last thing Harry wanted was for his godfather to be caught again, let alone so quickly.

There was one bright light in the midst of all the darkness, though. The Daily Prophet had somehow gotten ahold of the fact that Sirius Black had been at and escaped from Hogwarts. Right under Minister Fudge's nose. This, of course, brought about a massive public outcry against the man, who tried issuing a statement saying that the Ministry had everything under control. Someone had conjured a large pie above Fudge's head and dropped it on him.

The Dementors had also left Hogwarts, sent back to their dank prison to suck the life out of the condemned there. Not for the first time, Harry wondered how many other innocent people were in Azkaban, rotting away slowly like Sirius had been doing.

Harry had been quiet for awhile, not bothering to talk or respond to anyone. Even the staff eventually gave up on him after he failed to answer their questions in class. Flitwick had taken him aside to ask if anything was wrong, and Harry made up a story about how he wasn't sleeping well. He didn't like lying to his head of house, but he couldn't exactly tell the little man the truth, could he?

So lost in thought was he that he didn't hear the trap door opening. It wasn't until a pair of large, blue eyes were peering down at him did he snap out of his reverie.

"Luna?"

"Hello, Harry." Said Luna Lovegood in a very dreamy voice.

"Leon not with you?"

"No... Solieu had some Potions work to finish. I've done all of my work so far, though." Luna said.

"Ah. Sorry, didn't mean to ignore you. I was just--"

"Thinking about your godfather."

Harry blinked. "My godfather? Luna, how...?"

Luna smiled, moving to sit in the chair opposite Harry. "The Quibbler has been tracking Sirius Black's whereabouts since last summer. My father found some very interesting things about him. Did you know he once went to Antarctica and was nearly conned into marrying a warm-water penguin?"

Harry wasn't sure where to start on *that* one. "Why... was a warm-water penguin down in Antarctica?"

"Well, he got lost, didn't he?" Luna said.

"Well... I'm not sure how much of what your father found was factual, but... but yeah, he is my godfather. You won't tell anyone, will you? The last thing I need..."

"Of course I won't." Luna replied.

"Thanks." Harry said, feeling far less tense, despite the fact that one of the school's strangest people apparently knew of his relationship to Sirius. "It's a nice day. I wish I was feeling good enough to enjoy it."

"Have you spoken with Professor Lupin? It would appear that he's leaving..." Luna said, trailing off slowly.

Harry knew why that was happening. Professor Snape, furious about the goings-on, had told the whole of Slytherin that Lupin was a werewolf. In turn, Lupin had decided to quit before the hate mail began pouring in. Harry actually had gone to see the man (once he had turned up, anyway) to tell him what had happened the night he had transformed. It was then that Harry learned that Snape had been brewing Lupin a potion the whole year that eased his werewolf transformations and made him rather docile. He had just forgotten to take it the night that Sirius had dragged Ron off.

Harry had gotten the Marauder's Map back, something that had surprised him greatly. Lupin had just smiled, telling Harry to use it responsibly. Of course, knowing what he now knew, Harry couldn't take that request seriously. Shortly after getting the Map back, Harry had gone on another Sugar Quill run, this time leaving the box in the Nest so he wouldn't have to tote a handful around with him.

Ron had recovered quickly - his leg wasn't badly broken, though Madam Pomfrey had grilled him about how he had gotten it. Ron had tried his best to come up with a good story on the spot, but Madam Pomfrey didn't seem to believe him.

Solieyu, whose only issues had been the rather strong exposure to the Dementor swarm, had been released the next day. He had quickly slipped back into his old habit of seemingly never sleeping and popping up in places, seemingly at random.

Hermione and Tonks, interestingly enough, seemed to hit it off after their night of rescuing together. Tonks had even given Hermione a bunch of hair care tips after hearing that the girl hated the way hers puffed out like it did.

Harry turned his head to look at Luna, who was gazing outside and smiling. Harry wasn't exactly sure what to think of Luna. She was very odd, though she did seem to say very interesting things every blue moon. She had followed Solieyu around as best she could the day he was released from the hospital wing. He still couldn't tell if Solieyu really did like the girl or if he was just trying to keep from hurting her feelings.

Turning to look back at the ceiling again, Harry breathed out a silent sigh. He just wanted the school year to hurry and end. That way he could get his nightmarish time at the Dursleys' over with for another year. It still made him furious to no end that he could have been spending time with Sirius over the summer instead, but due to that rat escaping, he was stuck going back to Number Four. Not for the first time, he wished that Hermione's ugly cat Crookshanks *had* eaten 'Scabbers'... but without him, Sirius would never be able to clear his name. It was all very bothersome.

"Sorry I'm not being very talkative." Harry said, breaking the long silence that had fallen over the Nest.

Still gazing outside, Luna replied, "I find that silence can sometimes help cure things that other methods can't."

Harry supposed, to some degree, that that was true. He was enjoying just sitting in the silence. Though Tonks and Solieyu would probably do the same with no hesitation, he just felt like he connected with Luna somehow. It was a very odd feeling, thinking he had something in common with the girl.

"Maybe." He finally said. "But silence can't change what's happened."

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To no one's great surprise, Gryffindor managed to win the House Cup that year. Fred and George had done *something* to sharply boost their House's standings, as the Ravenclaws had been winning prior to the last day. Harry had tried getting the two to spill the beans as to what they had done, but neither would tell their secret.

But that was alright - Ravenclaw had won the Quidditch Cup. As long one of the other Houses managed to rip the Cups away from Slytherin, Harry was happy. Harry had noticed Malfoy looking more sour than usual ever since both Buckbeak and Sirius had escaped. Though he would never admit to it, Harry couldn't help but want to tell Malfoy exactly what he had done, just to further rub it all in.

During the Leaving Feast, Tonks leaned over and asked, "What's on your mind?"

"Hm? Oh, just thinking. It's been another interesting year, huh?"

"Yup. At least Voldemort didn't come after you somehow this time, though." Tonks said, grinning.

"How very true." Harry said, nodding slowly. "So what are our plans for the summer?"

"Staying at home, as usual." Tonks said, blandly.

"We're going to Egypt." Luna said, smiling.

"We?" Tonks asked.

"Luna and her father invited mother and I along." Solieyu said. "It was a... very gracious offer. It's been ages since I travelled anywhere other than here and back."

Harry and Tonks exchanged a glance, then grinned at Solieyu, who made a face and looked away.

"You and your mum got a plan to get me out this year?" Harry asked, looking at Tonks.

"Dunno. Hopefully there won't be any fat women or house elves popping in to make things difficult, though." Tonks replied, looking thoughtful for a moment before taking a swig of pumpkin juice.

"Yeah, hopefully." Harry said, staring down at his plate. "Bloody Wormtail."

"Yeah." Tonks agreed. "We'll think o' something, mate. Don't worry. I bounce ideas around in my head all year on stuff we *might* be able to do to get you out or otherwise keep an eye on you. I'll think o' something."

"And I thank you for your concern, m'lady." Harry said, chuckling.

"Oh, shut up." Tonks said, grinning and punching Harry in the arm.

"Hey! No punching, Nymmy!" Harry exclaimed.

"Don't you call me Nymmy!" Tonks retorted, giving Harry the evil eye.

"Eep. Yes, ma'am!" Harry said, trying to hide a smile. He picked at his food for awhile, listening as those around him had conversations. Down the table, he saw Lynch alternating between looking mopey and proud. Steven had stopped Harry in the hall not long before the final meal of the term, thanking him again for helping to make Ravenclaw the Quidditch Cup winners that year. Harry was glad that they had won, despite Fate's best efforts to stop him.

"I think I'm gonna go for a quick walk." Harry said suddenly, getting to his feet and making his way out of the Great Hall.

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"Whatcha doin' down here?"

Harry looked over his shoulder to see Tonks approaching. He just shrugged in reply and turned his gaze back out over the lake. In the distance, the giant squid was attempting to leap out of the water like a dolphin. It wasn't doing a very good job.

"Trying to process everything, I guess. It still feels like it all happened yesterday. My memory's been like swiss cheese lately. Can't remember much of anything." Harry admitted.

"So I've noticed. You alright?" Tonks asked, stepping up beside Harry.

"Yeah, I'll be fine. I had a talk with Dumbledore, you know. About the night everything happened." Harry said.

"Yeah?"

"He said he had 'acquaintances' that would be able to keep a lookout for either Pettigrew or a rat missing a toe." Harry said. "But even with that, I still don't feel very happy about how things turned out."

"I'm not that happy about it either. I still have to tell mum about Sirius not being an evil murderer." Tonks said, scuffing at the ground.

"Let's tell her on the ride back. Or no, no - *after* the ride back. I don't want her swerving all over the place." Harry said, scowling at the memories of Andromeda's awful driving skills.

"Alright. I wonder if she prepares herself for anything we *might* tell her." Tonks wondered aloud. "I mean, our previous years, we've come back with tales of adventures. This year was... well, we weren't facing down Voldemort, but I'd say the Dementors were evil enough to qualify. She'll have kittens if we mention the time travel."

"And really, we'd *have* to explain what happened if she asked." Harry said, tilting his head. "I mean, it'd be impossible to explain without the time turner. I'm glad Hermione decided to turn that damn thing in."

"Did she? That's good. One less thing for you to worry about next year. I'm sure something wacky is bound to happen then." Tonks said. "Love, adventure, and *MASS/VE ANGST!*"

"Oh, shut up." Grumbled Harry.

"Heee. Cheer up, emopants." Tonks said, grinning. "Come on, let's get back up to the school and enjoy our last night here for the year."

"Alright." Harry said.

The two started back up towards the castle, Harry looking off towards the Willow every so often.

"Wouldn't it be a kicker if Sirius turned up on your Aunt and Uncle's doorstep?" Tonks said.

"Oh man, they'd all try stuffing themselves in the cupboard at the same time. Emergency services would be called in, the story would be on the news, and I'd suffer endlessly for it all somehow." Harry said. "Don't even joke about that. Besides, I don't even want to think about Sirius being out where lots of people can see him. The Dursleys would definitely call the police on him."

"Still - it'd knock 'em into line, knowing you have an 'evil murderer' for a godfather and that he knows where they live." Tonks said, grinning widely. "Just think about the looks on their faces!"

"I don't want to think about the Dursleys unless I have to." Said Harry.
"Bad enough I'm forced back there tomorrow."

"Aww, I know. But really - we'll think of something. And this time we won't be late. I promise." Tonks said.

"Don't make promises." Harry murmured.

"Alright. Then I'll just say we'll try as hard as we can. That better?"

"Much." Harry said.

"Now come on. When I left, Lynch had leapt onto the Slytherin table and was singing some weird victory song." Tonks said, grabbing at Harry's arm and tugging.

"What!" Harry cried. "This was happening and you didn't tell me sooner? Oh, man! I've probably missed all the fun..."

Just as they entered the Entrance Hall, Lynch came bursting out of the Great Hall, laughing. Shortly after, a pair of seventh-year Slytherins Harry didn't recognize came bolting after him. Both of which, Harry noted, seemed to have cheesecake all over their heads.

"...I didn't just see that." Harry finally said.

"Good. Neither did I then." Tonks muttered. "That was just... odd. I don't think I want to know what happened after I left."

"Neither do I. I think we're going to find *out*, but I'd really rather not." Harry said.

Giving each other a wary look, the two Ravenclaws headed back into the Great Hall.

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"I like these train seats. I dunno why." Harry said, bouncing slightly on his. "Gonna hafta see about buying one to jury-rig into a couch when I get my own place."

"You're absolutely mental." Tonks said, sitting down next to him.

"I am not. These things induce sleep or something." Harry said.

Opposite them, Solieyu and Luna were sitting down, while Hermione and Ron were standing in the doorway.

"Here's to hoping nothing bad happens next year." Hermione said.

"Ooh, don't do that - you'll jinx it!" Tonks exclaimed.

"Oh, don't be silly. I'm not the least bit superstitious." Hermione said, sniffing.

"What are you two planning to do over the holidays?" Solieyu asked, glancing to the pair of Gryffindors.

"Oh, we're going down to Italy." Hermione said, grinning. "Since my parents don't get to see me much anymore, we usually go on trips during the summer."

"Lucky. I'll be stuck at home with Fred and George the whole time." Ron groused. "Won't *that* be fun?"

"What *did* they do to earn Gryffindor so many points at the last minute?" Asked Harry.

"Can't tell. They made us both promise." Ron said.

"Oh, you wretched..." Harry began.

"Nothing personal, Harry." Hermione said, grinning. "They say it's revenge for you not telling them about what was going on with me this year."

"What was going on?" Ron asked.

"Nothing, nothing." Hermione said. "Come along, Ronald. We need to find a compartment before they're all empty."

"Don't call me 'Ronald'! And what's *that*?" Ron said, nodding towards the compartment's window. A small, round ball of feathers was apparently trying to beat itself in through the glass.

Tonks hopped up and opened the window, causing the little creature to burst inside, hooting wildly and flying in abnormal, dipping circles overhead.

"Ohhh, it's an owl!" Luna cooed. "How adorable."

"That thing's an OWL?" Ron said, astonished.

"It's got a letter." Solieyu pointed out.

"How's it flying? The envelope's larger than the owl." Tonks said.

"Come here, you." Harry finally said, reaching up and plucking the owl like a snitch out of the air. "Calm down! Here, what've you brought for us?"

After somehow managing to untie the envelope from the little owl's leg, Harry let the fluffball go, where it bobbed and twisted through the air, finally ending up on top of Ron's head, where he briefly had a fit until Hermione calmed him down.

"It's... it's from Sirius!" Harry said, staring down at the envelope.

"Well go on, then." Hermione said, tugging Ron into the compartment and closing the door behind them. "What's it say?"

"Let's see..." Harry said. Taking a haggard-looking bit of parchment out of the envelope, Harry read aloud, "*Dear Harry - Sorry it's taken me so long to get to you. I've been travelling a bit. I've been cooped up so long, I figured a little trip wouldn't do me any harm. Don't worry - I'm staying as a dog for the most part. I've actually found a nice little cave to stay in. It's nice and warm at night and a cool breeze passes through most days. I found this little owl in here, actually. One of its wings was wounded - looked like one the nearby village's children was lobbing rocks at it - so I nursed it back to health. I don't think I could stand having it around all the time even if I wasn't on the run, so if you would, try and find a good home for it...*"

Harry looked up from the letter. "Ron, isn't your family's owl all ancient and stuff? Fred and George have complained about it a few times."

"Well... yeah, Errol's a bit out there... but you don't expect me to take care of *this* thing, do you?" Ron asked, pointing up at his head, where the tiny owl had seemingly decided to take a nap.

"If you can't, maybe your parents can." Harry said. "Anyway, lemme continue reading here. Let's see... *'In other news, I've got an interesting surprise planned for you, so be sure to keep an eye out for anything out of the ordinary. Can't say more than that for now, though. It'd ruin the surprise. Running short on space now, so I'll just say this - take care and don't try mailing me. Would look suspicious if owls were coming and going from this cave regularly. I'll see you soon. -- Sirius'*"

"Sounds like he's been busy." Tonks said.

"Yeah. I'm glad he's taking care to keep hidden but still getting a chance to have some fun." Harry said. "Sounds like he's enjoying the freedom to go wherever he wants again."

Just then, a knock came on their compartment door. Turning, the collected group saw Ginny Weasley standing outside. Ron opened the door up and asked, "What is it?"

"Fred and George got us all a compartment down th-- oh, look at the teeny owl!" Ginny squealed, staring at the sleeping owl in Ron's hair.

"Oh no." Ron groaned. He had seen that look on his sister's face before.

"Come here, you..." Ginny cooed, reaching up and gently removing the owl from Ron's hair, somehow not waking it up in the process. "Ohh, it's adorable! Whose is it?"

"No one's." Hermione said. "It just showed up, trying to fly through the window."

"Ginny, no..." Ron began.

"Oh, I've got to show him to Fred and George. Come on, you two!" Ginny said, smiling as she took off down the hallway.

Ron groaned again. "Merlin's wand, I'm going to go mad this summer. The twins *and* that owl?"

"Yes, yes, it's very tragic. Come along, Ronald." Hermione said, grabbing the boy by the ear and tugging him out into the hall. "We'll see you lot later. Have a good summer!"

"You too." Harry said, grinning as the two Gryffindors left. "...I swear, if someone had told me I'd be seeing that when I first got to Hogwarts..."

"Stranger things have happened." Tonks said.

"How very true." Harry said. "At least we don't have to worry about the owl, though."

"Yeah, seemed like love at first sight with Ginny, didn't it?" Tonks said, laughing.

Harry leaned over and closed the compartment door again, leaning back and smiling. He felt *much* better knowing Sirius was out there somewhere, enjoying life again. Briefly, he wondered if the man had cleaned up and bought fresh robes. He couldn't quite imagine Sirius looking like a hobo for the rest of his life.

Soon, the Hogwarts Express had started up and the long trip back to King's Cross began. The four Ravenclaws chatted about the previous year and what might be happening during their fourth year (or third, in Luna's case). Eventually, the four became sleepy - with Harry inserting an 'I told you they induced sleep' before he drifted off.

Harry was the first to wake back up. Darkness had fallen outside of the train, and a flash of light out the window caught Harry's eye. Smiling, he nudged Tonks awake. She let out a groggy mumble of "What?"

"Look outside." Harry whispered.

"Outside?" Tonks repeated. She sat up and, after rubbing her eyes for awhile, looked out the window. "Ooh..."

A meteor shower, much like the one they had seen the previous summer when visiting Solieyu's house, was illuminating the night sky. Deciding not to wake up Luna (who looked so peaceful when she was asleep) or Solieyu, (who just needed the sleep) Harry and Tonks sat and watched the light show in silence, Tonks leaning against Harry.

"I really hope nothing bad happens over the summer. Or during the school year." Tonks murmured softly. "I'm tired of bad stuff always happening to you."

"So am I." Harry quietly agreed.

"...Hey, Harry?"

"Yes?"

"What's on your mind?"

"A lot, right now." Harry said. "What's going to happen at Number Four... whether or not Sirius will be spotted and caught... whether or not Dumbledore's buddies will find Pettigrew or not. Stuff like that."

"Kids our age shouldn't be worrying about abusive relatives and murderers." Tonks commented, sighing.

"Yeah. I'm not sure how much 'kid' is left in us though, after all we've been through so far. Dunno about you, but I feel a lot older than I am." Harry said.

"Ditto." Tonks said.

"Hey, Tonks?"

"Hm?"

"What about you? What's on *your* mind?" Harry asked.

"Lot of worrying, mostly." Tonks said. "Worried about you and Sirius, mostly. Worried about next year at school, too."

"Ahh..."

"Yeah. Harry, if the Dursleys start to do anything..." Tonks began.

"I'll escape by any means necessary and come home." Harry said.

"Home?"

"Your place is more of a home than Number Four is." Harry said, smiling faintly. "Home is somewhere I feel safe... where I don't *have* to worry about anything."

"Harry..."

"Blame those things if I start getting melodramatic." Harry said, pointing at the meteor shower. "Just feeling a bit odd right now, I guess."

"Quite alright. Come on, let's go back to sleep. I think we've got a good half hour, at least." Tonks mumbled, laying her head over on Harry's shoulder.

"Oi oi. I'm buying you a pillow or something for Christmas this year." Harry muttered.

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After the train pulled into King's Cross and everyone unloaded their belongings, people started saying their goodbyes. Luna's father came to pick her up - Mr. Lovegood gave Solieyu a good, long look after seeing his daughter clinging to one of his arms.. Solieyu once more left by himself. Molly Weasley had come to pick her kids up, giving a friendly wave and smile to Harry as they left. Andromeda was a bit late picking Tonks and Harry up, but they didn't particularly mind. It was nice and quiet at the station for once, which did feel rather odd.

Once she did pop up, she apologized for being so late, claiming that the Ministry had been having a fit over Sirius Black still eluding capture. Harry and Tonks shared a grin, but kept their promise of not telling Andromeda what had happened until after they pulled into Number Nine.

Once safely at the Tonks residence, Harry told Andromeda to wait before they got out. He and Tonks then proceeded to launc into their story. To say Andromeda was shocked would be an understatement. Harry and Tonks told her the entire thing - mostly dealing with the night of Sirius' attempt to kill Pettigrew and subsequent break-out from Hogwarts by Harry and a rogue hippogriff.

"I don't believe it." She finally said.

Harry grinned wryly. "Oh? And why's that... *Little Andi*?"

Tonks dissolved into giggles as Andromeda turned around in her seat and stared at Harry, gaping like a fish. "Bu... no. Sirius was... and... oh, bugger all."

"Language, mother!" Tonks said in a singsong voice.

"So... Sirius is innocent... roaming the countryside... and... You know what? I think I'm gonna need a stiff drink for this one to go down. Don't you two ever have a *peaceful* year at that school?" Andromeda asked as the three exited the car and began unloading Harry and Tonks' trunks.

"Not as such, no." Harry said. He then lifted Hedwig's cage and smiled. "I'm leaving you in their care again, girl. You're better off here than coming with me. The Dursleys would lock you up so you couldn't go out at night."

The snowy owl just ruffled her feathers and chirped in response.

Handing over Hedwig's cage to Andromeda, Harry sighed. "Back to the torture room I go, I guess."

"I'll run my ideas by mum tonight." Tonks said, coming over and giving Harry a tight hug. "Don't worry."

"Good luck thinking of something." Harry said, chuckling.

"Actually," Andromeda said, smiling slyly, "I have an idea of my own. And the best part is, it's foolproof."

"What is it?" Harry and Tonks asked in unison.

Andromeda shook her head and wagged a finger. Clicking her tongue a few times, she replied, "You'll just have to wait and see. Consider it punishment for calling me 'Little Andi' - I hated being called Little Andi. Stupid Sirius."

"Now you know how I feel." Tonks muttered, just loud enough for her mother to hear.

"Anyway, hang on for two weeks, Harry, and you'll be free for the rest of summer. Think you'll be alright?" Andromeda asked, her tone becoming serious again.

"Haven't died yet." Harry replied, dryly. When both women sent him a glare, he raised his hands up and added, "Alright, alright - I'll be extra careful, okay? I wouldn't mind being taken out to lunch or dinner once or twice, though."

"Noted." Andromeda said, smiling. She walked over and gave Harry a hug that would have made Molly Weasley proud. "Hang in there, Harry. I know it isn't easy. I've been working on Albus on and off all year. I may have something worked out, but it probably won't happen this year."

Harry blushed at the hug, then nodded slowly. "Alright. Thanks, by the way. For everything."

"No thanks needed." Andromeda said. "Just keep yourself as healthy and injury-free as you can and we'll call it even."

"See you soon, then." Harry said, smiling crookedly. "Take care."

"You too." Tonks said, waving as Harry started his long walk back to Number Four. Once he had vanished into the night, the girl looked at her mother and asked, "What do you have planned, mum?"

"Well," Andromeda began, levitating the two trunks up and heading for the house, "You know how I wrote and said the Ministry's been working us extra hard?"

"Yeah..."

"Well, they've decided to compensate in a very interesting way..."

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Author's Notes: Book 3 is complete! I know I said I was gonna try for 19, but there was no way in hell I could have padded both chapters that much. So I combined them into one long one. Ah well. Prisoner is still longer than Chamber was, in any case! I'm sure all of you can guess that Andromeda's 'compensation' from the Ministry was! And if you can't, then shame on you - go reread Goblet again!

I'm so happy to have the first three books done. I've no idea how I've managed to finish the last HALF of Prisoner so damn fast, but I've done it. One reason is because I tend to get bored easily, despite having far too much to do. Lately, whenever I've gotten bored, I sit and write. My arms hate it when I marathon write, but there you go.

Since I've been busting myself so hard finishing Prisoner, I've decided to take the first half of March off. I don't think that's asking much, given my insane schedule. Plus, as I've mentioned, I have basically nothing solid planned for Goblet yet. So I need to write up a first draft, go over all the little chapter bits I've written in the past, decided if I want to use any, etc. Then I need to implement the timeline into things and...ugh, it'll take the two weeks just to plan out a route to take! Don't worry, I know EXACTLY how I want to start Goblet off. And if you're lucky, I may just get the writing bug and jot the whole first chapter up during my two week 'break'.

I want to once again thank everyone who reads and reviews, as it's been a strong source of motivation for me. I hope everyone is eagerly awaiting Goblet - I know I am. So many of my major changes can FINALLY happen in Goblet. You've already seen the first major change - Harry's Patronus being a snake. More changes are to come. I know people don't like reading straight-out rehashes where all the events are the same. The three Triwizard Tasks aside, though, I'm not sure how much of Goblet Relit will follow the canon. Harry will finally be old enough to start being molded the way I'd like him to wind up being.

And I WILL continue fixing Philosopher's Stone's chapters over my break. The rest of book 1 will be fixed before I post Goblet chapter 1, I promise.

I've rambled long enough - I hope everyone has enjoyed Prisoner. I'll see you guys in book 4 - The Goblet of Fire Relit!